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The Bamboo Cinema:
A Formal, Cultural and Industrial Analysis of
Hong Kong Cinema in the 1990s

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The Bamboo Cinema:
A Formal, Cultural and Industrial Analysis of Hong Kong Cinema in the 1990s

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Dedication

To my mother, may she rest in peace.

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The Bamboo Cinema:
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In the 1990s, the fact that Hong Kong cinema thrived in the world market, with both art and commercial films, is a theoretical anomaly. Despite its petite size and lack of government support and protection, it has survived both colonial administration and Hollywood domination. Hong Kong has a long history of prolific filmmaking, and has flourished during a decade full of challenges, and out of proportion to the size of the city and the industry. Hong Kong film is now recognized for its directors' personal style and action aesthetic. How did this happen? How did Hong Kong filmmaking develop into an efficient system that could survive the harsh conditions of its past and thrive in the competitive environment of the 1990s? Hong Kong's story is one of paradox and Hong Kong cinema relates that story by embracing paradox in both its industrial system and cultural ideology. This project is a formal, cultural and industrial analysis of Hong Kong cinema in its multiple contexts. Instead of replicating the Hollywood studio system or

other national cinema models, Hong Kong cinema, like bamboo surviving by bending with the wind, has developed a flexible system adapted to its habitat, but that also simultaneously created a space for a unique style of filmmaking with a transnational perspective. I will investigate how the cinematic system worked, and how individual filmmakers devised tactics to both work within and push the limits of the system. I will explore what they reveal about the local condition I call "orphan island anxiety", a deep sense of insecurity underneath the economic miracle, and a paradoxical state that people from a non-conventional nation state experience in an age of universal and normative ideas of the nation. The case of Hong Kong cinema will illuminate for us an industrial model substantially different from that of Hollywood, and a voice that was missing from official Sino-British talks, which reveals a cultural sensibility not found in either Hollywood or in Chinese national cinema.

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Chapter 1 Introduction: To Live

"Notice that the stiffest tree is most easily cracked, while the bamboo or willow survives by bending with the wind."

– Bruce Lee

Can Hong Kong cinema's model change the world's media power structure? What does the exuberant vitality of Hong Kong cinema tell us about the factors needed for resisting Hollywood domination? What does the study of Hong Kong cinema tell us about the problems in the current modes for studying the Hollywood studio system, global media and national cinemas?

The creative energy of Hong Kong movies is mesmerizing, but the fact that it survives and flourishes out of proportion to the size its industry and city is even more intriguing. In the 1990s, Hong Kong cinema seemed to suddenly emerge as a world-class cinema of a world-class city, with both art and commercial films thriving in the world market. In this decade Hong Kong movies were spreading the fastest around the world, entering mainstream theater in the West and collecting the most awards in international film festivals despite the petite size of the industry, intensified global competition, and a lack of government support and protection. Only a couple of decades earlier, the public's impression of the movies by this same industry and same city was that they were un-differentiable chop suey and kung-fu flicks from a colonial backwater. In its previous history, Hong Kong cinema was rarely dominated by Hollywood features, unlike its neighbors. In the 1990s, filmmakers like John Woo, Jackie Chan, Chow Yun Fat, Michelle Yeo, Jet Li and Yuan Woo Ping, etc. became household names in Hollywood, the Mecca of commercial cinema. Filmmakers like Wong Kar Wai, Tony Leung and

Maggie Cheung collected awards in Cannes, Berlin and Venice film festivals, the Meccas of art cinema. The stylish action aesthetics of Hong Kong cinema was likened to the aesthetics of other national cinemas like German Expressionism, and Soviet Montage Italian Neo-realism and American Film Noir, etc (Bordwell "Aesthetic"). The motif of protagonists with double allegiances (or literally double faces) was replicated in Hollywood films like Face/Off (John Woo, 1997) and The Departed (Scorsese, 2006). The success of Hong Kong cinema is a theoretical anomaly: media theories generally predict cultural homogenization or early death for unprotected culture industries in colonial territories. Flanked by Hollywood on one side and Chinese State on the other, Hong Kong cinema should easily have succumbed to these larger powers. Instead, it flourished as both popular and art cinema. How did it accomplish this? How did it even survive?

Hong Kong cinema arose in relation to specific local, regional, and global contexts. In the 1990s, Hong Kong occupied an interstitial space between British colonialism, Chinese nationalism, and global capitalism. My dissertation investigates Hong Kong cinema's industrial system and cultural ideology in relation to these contexts. My ultimate concern in this project is whether Hong Kong's cinematic system encourages a genuine voice and intercultural communication. Can the local speak? Can Hong Kong cinema present a local voice in a context dominated by competing national politics and global economics?

Hong Kong's story is one of paradox, and Hong Kong cinema spoke that story by embracing paradox in both its industrial system and its cultural ideology. I would argue that, instead of mechanically imitating the Hollywood studio system, Hong Kong cinema survived by developing a system that was well adapted to its multiple contexts, but that simultaneously created a space for a unique style of filmmaking with a transnational

perspective. While Hollywood is situated as a superpower, Hong Kong cinema is situated as a non-sovereign entity, which cannot exclude external actors from its domestic authority structure. In Chinese culture, bamboo is a symbol of vitality and longevity. It survives by bending with the wind. Hong Kong cinema developed a flexible system, like the bamboo, that enabled it to withstand disruptive external forces. The system of Hong Kong cinema was so efficient that it not only enabled this local-culture industry to resist Hollywood domination, survive political chaos, and a colonial economic system for almost a hundred years, but also to flourish in the world market in the 1990s, a time when Hollywood dominated the Asian markets. At that time, Hong Kong's small and open economy was most vulnerable to international and speculative economic activities, and the society was susceptible to political anxiety, due to the sovereignty change. In the late 1990s the sojourn of Hong Kong filmmakers in Hollywood helped give Hollywood a face-lift. Partnership with Hong Kong cinema, and the proliferation of autonomous film industries like Hong Kong cinema eating away at Hollywood's overseas markets, forced Hollywood to respond. But most importantly, the films this system produced spoke with a local voice to its Asian audience. It told the story of what I call "Orphan Island Anxiety," a paradoxical condition in which political anxiety is combined and commensurate with economic prosperity, a deep sense of insecurity that also plagues people living in Taiwan and other Newly Industrializing Economies (NIEs) in East Asia, which were the target markets of Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s. Hong Kong cinema sold "Hong Kong Wonder": the fiction that economic wealth can be used to bargain for political rights and autonomy. Together, this unique cultural ideology and adaptive industrial system enabled Hong Kong cinema to survive amidst competing national and global powers.

The Hong Kong the world was seeing at this time was a mythical city. Popular images amplified its laissez-faire policy and obscured the colonial character of its government. It was often depicted as a postmodern city without a history. In the imperialist narrative of colonial tranquility it is described as transforming miraculously from a barren rock to a world-class city. The 1990s is a decade of paradox in Hong Kong history, and its society was characterized by contradiction and confusion. Hong Kong was scheduled to return from Britain to China on July 1, 1997. In that year Hong Kong's per capita GDP was higher than that of Britain,[1] contrary to dependency theory's standard prediction of devastation and continuing economic dependency of a former colony on its former colonial master. Instead of gladly anticipating Hong Kong ending its attachment to its colonizer, Hong Kong's citizens expressed, in various public polls, their anxiety about returning to the motherland. The "1997 factor" overshadowed everyday life from the global to the personal: international politics such as the Sino-British conflict, the colonial government's plan to completely sino-ize the sizable civil service team, conglomerates' relocation of their headquarters overseas, to personal choices such as the massive migration of the middle class. On the one hand there was the euphoric atmosphere celebrating a phenomenal economic achievement. On the other hand, there was a despair induced by political uncertainty, economic insecurity and social instability in the wake of the 1989 violent crackdown of the student movement in Beijing that had aggravated the public's fears over the years as Hong Kong approaching 1997. During the transitional period, the government was "a lame duck" in its domestic administration and "a toothless tiger" in international affairs. In the 1990s Hong Kong was modern and powerful economically, but was backward and powerless politically as a colony.

Hong Kong cinema, situated in such a fairy-tale land, was no less mythologized. When Westerners commended Hong Kong filmmakers' frantic filmmaking style as

"anything-goes", it was as if Hong Kong cinema operated in a political vacuum: a free-market nirvana and a culturally hybrid wonderland in a borderless world governed by unfettered global capitalism. In this decade Hong Kong cinema was also characterized by paradox. It was a booming cinema in a busting film industry; a commercial system enabling the rise of homegrown art-house cinema. In the mid-1990s while Hong Kong cinema was at its peak in the Western market, the film industry was already in dire situation. Local media pronounced Hong Kong cinema's death in 1995[2], but in 1996 the colonial government still organized a tour titled "Hong Kong Wonders Never Cease" with award winning actress Josephine Siao[3] and Raymond Chow (head of Golden Harvest) as cultural ambassadors to the United States to promote trade and tourism. In the past, auteur directors like King Hu[4] and Cecile Tang (Tang Shu Shuen)[5] were rare. In the 1990s, a decade when filmmakers had no safety within the comfortable bubble of the studio, the system of Hong Kong cinema was extremely commercial in its perfect competition market structure populated mostly by small size independent production houses. Interestingly it was this commercial system that accommodated homegrown award-winning film directors like Wong Kar Wai, Fruit Chan, Ann Hui and Stanley Kwan, who enjoyed longer careers than their predecessors and their films were commercially viable and shown side by side with mainstream entertainment films. Hong Kong cinema is known in the world for its stylish films, with neurotic energy, kinetic action, fast-paced editing and unabashedly commercial orientation. Paradoxically, the Hong Kong directors' personal style was best showcased in this decade of intensified global competition.

Like bamboo, Hong Kong cinema's strength came from the flexibility that enabled it to adapt to its volatile habitat. Its autonomy can be seen in the way it adapted to global "host systems" without losing its identity. Like national cinema, it has created a

space for filmmaking distinctive from Hollywood and Hollywood-dominated cinemas. Its art cinema, promoting the cult status of the auteur directors who engage in formal experiment and social and political criticism, followed the rules of the game in international film festival circuit. But it basically operated as a commercial system with the matching of star, genre and market. While it did not replicate the Hollywood studio system exactly, it did have something in common with classical-era Hollywood that Schatz describes: various historical forces struck a delicate balance to provide a consistent system, and thus a body of work with a uniform style (*Genius*). In Hollywood there is the symbiosis of art and industry, and auteur directors were limited by the constraints of the studio system and yet enabled by having a structure. Each filmmaker had to play on his strengths and come up with his individual tactics to work within and beyond the system. In Hong Kong, filmmakers also had to work within and beyond the system in order to work efficiently in this industry, where art is embedded in a global commercial system. To produce movies that are politically feasible, commercially viable, institutionally practicable, and culturally accessible, they needed to "think inside the box." They needed to be aware of hard boundaries that cannot be changed, factor in the specific, enduring parameters of production, know what different stakeholders will accept, and recognize a variety of written and unwritten rules. They had to understand the specific, enduring political, economic, social, and ideological parameters set by governments, financiers, industry sectors, and opinion leaders, including the colonial context, small domestic market, and dependence on foreign markets, as well as rules and conventions of overseas "host" systems such as the Hollywood studios and European film festivals, the unpredictability of audience tastes and foreign governments' film policies.

To compete with Hollywood features and national cinema in overseas markets and film festivals, the filmmakers also have to "think outside the box": they need to

imagine beyond Hollywood convention and national cinema principle in order to offer audiences a new perspective, novel filmic style, and a unique ideological appeal. The conceptual framework of nations lead to the notion of Hong Kong as a subaltern in a vertical relationship to the two dominant cultures – Britain and China, denied of representation. Such a view delimits us to examine the ideological appeal of Hong Kong cinema, which was never a national cinema. Instead of searching for its cultural roots in China, or examining the differences between China and the West, Hong Kong cinema, dealing with Chinese characters from various Chinese and non-Chinese societies, exemplifies a horizontal vision of an intra-locally and inter-locally related Hong Kong, an inward examination of the non-hierarchical intra-Chinese relationship. It provides a transnational space to convey a Chinese-islander cultural sensibility – the limbo condition between the confusion of Diaspora and the solidarity of an eternal China; the interstitial space between China and the West – that was absent in Hollywood and Chinese national cinema and that appealed particularly to audiences in East Asia. Hong Kong's art and popular movies not only tell us where we escape from – the inevitable vertical relationship to the cultures and traditions of China and Britain, but also where we escape to – an imagined cosmopolitan city populated by marginal characters, instead of world-saving superheroes or nation-saving political moguls, a cultural sensibility on sale only in the supermarket of Hong Kong cinema.

The case of Hong Kong cinema reveals problems in existing modes of studying the Hollywood studio system, global media and colonial/cultural studies in East Asia. Hong Kong cinema is neither global like Hollywood, nor national like Chinese cinema. At present Hollywood is the most dominant cinema in the world, and its studio system is the most studied industrial model. With Hollywood cinema regarded as the norm for popular cinema, Hong Kong cinema entrance into the Western market is regarded as sub-

cultural. With the Hollywood studio system as the industry standard, Hong Kong cinema's cottage-like industrial model is regarded as sub-standard. With the concept of a national cinema as the norm, Hong Kong's transnational cinema being situated in a sub-sovereign territory is regarded as a sub-national.

Traditional modes of studying the film industry assert the centrality of the Hollywood studio system; film industries other than Hollywood are under-researched. Existing theories and methodologies, often Western-centered, are unable to conceptualize the mechanisms of Hong Kong's transnational film industry. In recent years in Europe there has been the rise of the new field of film festival research, which adopts modern system theories to understand the operating mechanisms of film festivals. In recent decades major European film festivals have played prominent parts in the system of Hong Kong cinema, and catapulted and sustained the careers of art film directors who might otherwise have faded away quickly in the commercial system of Hong Kong cinema like their predecessors. Some of these festivals' operations are no less commercial than that of the Hollywood studio system. Hong Kong's transnational cinema accentuates Hollywood's national specificity. Taking it seriously enables us to reformulate the traditional mode of studying the film industry, broadening its national focus to include comparative perspectives.

Global media studies often group together the other cinemas for generalization purposes in theory-led research, but Hong Kong cinema does not fit easily into existing group categories. As Poshek Fu and David Desser point out, the peculiarity of Hong Kong cinema is that it is "a cinema without a nation, a local cinema with transnational appeal" (5). The binary conception of "Hollywood global cinema vs. the other's national cinemas" blinds us to see the increasing interconnectivity of the world's cinemas and Hong Kong cinema's variable and flexible position in this context. Furthermore, in a

tightly knit filmmaking community like the Hong Kong film industry, personal factors such as individual filmmakers' particular practices and interpersonal relationships play a major role in the system. In studying the system of Hong Kong cinema, the "who" is as important as the "how" and "what" of the machine's operation. As pioneer of modern business management Peter Drucker says, "It is only managers – not nature or laws of economics or governments – that make resources productive!" (*Turbulent Times* 14) The glocalization theory (local adaptation of the global) in global media studies stops at the local level and doesn't go further to the personal level. By adopting an authorship approach in the last section of this dissertation, I will demonstrate not only the commercial value of the charisma of the global auteur, but also the importance of human agency in the capitalist machine of transnational cinema.

While Hollywood is studied in media studies departments, national cinemas of the rest of the world are often consigned to area studies which usually adopt a cultural studies approach. Although Hong Kong was a colony, Hong Kong cinema does not fit comfortably in Subaltern Studies which adopts the approach of history from below. The Hong Kong film industry was not attached to a political or economic power bloc, but the spreading of Hong Kong movies around the world cannot be regarded as a case for globalization from below. Annexed by the trade-oriented British Empire as its Far East outpost, Hong Kong was integrated into the international trade system ahead of its neighbors, and gained a privileged position in the world capitalist system. Situated in such a city, Hong Kong cinema was neither a subaltern in a vertical relationship nor an equal partner in a horizontal level playing field. The last three decades of British administration was characterized by "velvet colonialism" (Mitchell), a combination of soft authoritarianism with enforced economic growth, a condition shared by other East Asia Newly Industrializing Economies (NIEs) which were also former colonies

experiencing the British Empire's imperialism of free trade in the region. Hong Kong cinema, symptomatic of "colonialism with Hong Kong characteristics" accentuates the peculiarity of East Asia experience in post-colonial studies. This project will help broaden and deepen Asian cinema studies by adding a global and comparative perspective to historical and industrial studies.

Besides being flexible, Hong Kong cinema also shares the paradoxical double-sided characteristic with bamboo. At some point Hong Kong cinema was akin to a Diaspora cinema like "Jūksīng" (bamboo cane), a term referring to young Chinese born overseas who experience double alienation: considered as less than satisfactorily Chinese and not fully integrated into the mainstream culture. And yet they are also exalted as a model minority and overachievers in American culture. As a Jūksīng, Hong Kong cinema occupied a double position: it occupied a subordinate position in relation to Hollywood, but dominated other cinemas in Asia. Traditionally bamboo has been used as a symbol of positive cultural values such as longevity, unity, modesty and integrity. But less commonly it is also used as a negative symbol for the hypocrisy of intellectuals or the ferocity of a dominant group. Bamboo, despite its elegant outlook, is like the plant version of a cockroach. It survives shamelessly, endures tough conditions and spreads everywhere. Similarly Hong Kong cinema was applauded for its creativity, vitality, and survival, but the majority of its movies were also criticized for their vulgarity, sloppy production, and purported threat to the survival of the others' cinemas. In this project I'll illustrate the cultural chauvinism embedded in the cultural ideology of Hong Kong cinema.

In this research process, I realize the importance of critical dialogue between the academic community and industry practitioners and agree with John Caldwell's call for "theorizing from below" as well as his hypothesis of the "inverse credibility law": "the

higher one travels up the industrial food chain for insights, the more suspect and spin-driven the personal disclosures tend to become" (3). In the 1990s the organization structure of the Hong Kong film industry was relatively horizontal, instead of hierarchical, and power was less concentrated. While in the academy there are observed occasions of local scholars' dependency on Western scholarship, in the industry there are also incidents of executives who internalize the Hollywood model as the standard. Descriptions and explanations by executives of high rank, educated in the West, perfectly fluent in English and generally quite eloquent, should be taken with a grain of salt since what they said may reflect more of their ideals than the reality of what the other workers were doing and experiencing. In this project, besides the archival work, I got my information mostly from extensive interviews with veteran industry practitioners of various ranks, such as executive producer, financial controller, director, writer, and art director, to cinematographer and stuntmen, etc. Some of them are my friends from college who literally connect the dialogue between the academy and industry. I will use theoretical paradigms from the fields of cultural studies, global media studies, and the Hollywood studio system. I will adopt an integrated cultural-industrial analysis approach to investigate how the Hong Kong cinema system worked and what story it told.

CHAPTER REVIEW

This dissertation has nine chapters divided into three sections. Section one, "The Curious Case of Hong Kong Cinema," includes a literature review (chapter two) and a theoretical discussion (chapter three) and asks: "Why and how should we develop our own set of theories and methodologies?" Most existing literatures look at Hong Kong cinema only through standard frames of reference and see it as a miniature version of global Hollywood or a subordinate branch of Chinese cinema. But Hong Kong cinema is neither of these. Its filmmaking community, made up of émigrés, has depended heavily

on foreign markets, including the Sinophone territories (Southern China and overseas Chinese communities), Chopstick Culture (Chinese-influenced Southeast Asia and East Asia), and Western markets. It presents a unique case of a local culture industry that is closely regulated by a colonial government, while at the same time interacting with Chinese, Asian, American, and local cultures on a global stage. Over the years, Hong Kong filmmaking has been a sub-national dialect cinema in southern China, a Diaspora cinema for Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, a regional cinema in East Asia, and a transnational cinema in the West. Hong Kong cinema needs to be understood from multiple perspectives. Theories from the West were not generated to solve the problems of understanding Hong Kong cinema in its specific historical cultural setting. To understand Hong Kong cinema, I need to begin from its specific historical and cultural circumstances, instead of from models based on the Hollywood system.

Section two, "The Bamboo Cinema," discusses Hong Kong cinema in its historical cultural setting and asks: "How did Hong Kong cinema survive and thrive in a hostile and competitive environment?" Chapter four describes the development of Hong Kong cinema as characterized by interruption and alternation between the studio system and independent productions, in contrast to Hollywood's continual expansion. The industry survived its early years by developing an adaptive defense system: it devised special practices in financing, production, distribution, exhibition, and marketing, and maintained a flexible industry structure. In the 1990s, the industry switched to survival mode. Chapter five describes how, in response to the volatile environment of the 1990s, Hong Kong cinema switched to a cottage-industry system with skeleton crews, cash-based financing, and artisanal modes of production. What was perceived as signs of regression, was in fact the reinvigoration and modernization of the old system. A detailed description of the industry's operation draws on primary research material from extensive

interviews and archival research of magazines and government documents. This chapter discusses aspects of the macro-political economic context, such as film policy, censorship, and the financing and exhibition sector, as well as aspects of the micro-cultural production context, such as the dual-department organizational structure, the housekeeping role of the producer, and the role of scriptwriter as the director's service provider.

Section three, "The Supermarket of Hong Kong Cinema," presents case studies of three directors, from the most commercial to the most artistic, to show the spectrum of Hong Kong cinema. It asks: "By integrating itself into an international market and claiming a collective cultural identity, did Hong Kong cinema inscribe itself into a subordinate position in relation to Hollywood? Can the local have a voice, a collective locus of agency to speak for its condition, without assuming cultural solidarity among a heterogeneous people?" This section describes how Hong Kong filmmakers depicted a peculiar local condition I call "orphan island anxiety," a paradoxical condition in which political anxiety is combined and commensurate with economic prosperity. Hong Kong, as a colony, a forever-dependent territory, and a sub-sovereign entity with high degree of autonomy, is an oddity in an age of the universal and normative ideas of the nation. Operating within the same industrial structure and breathing the same culture, these directors share this thematic concern and a common approach to production. But each differentiates himself with a personal style, and special filmmaking practices to find his unique position in the market. The directors' interpretations of the myth of "Hong Kong Wonders" range from Wong Jing's vision of illusive autonomy in his God of Gambler series, to Tsui Hark's re-imagination of history and rethinking of Chinese nationalism in his Once Upon A Time in China series, to Wong Kar Wai's cynicism in his oeuvre depicting a fin-de-siècle Hong Kong.

Interestingly, all of their protagonists are either orphans or without a mother. The motif of the absent mother or loss of a maternal presence runs through their films in the decade when Hong Kong was returning to the motherland. While Hong Kong cinema enjoyed the advantage of hybrid vigor, in the new millennium it has declined without fostering a new generation of stars and filmmakers. It experiences a hybrid sterility, like Bauhinia, the floral emblem of Hong Kong.[6] Hybrid and sterility have negative cultural meanings in traditional Chinese society. In Chinese culture, the most commonly used curse phrase involves the other's mother. And calling the other person a mixed-blood hybrid (zhazhong) and wishing him to never have male offspring (juezhong; juehou) is considered insulting. For various reasons Hong Kong cinema has been denigrated and neglected in the past. Academic study on Hong Kong cinema and Hong Kong culture only started in recent decades. Most of the existing literature cannot adequately explain the mechanisms of Hong Kong cinema. What dimensions and questions do these scholars overlook in their analysis? And how can we rectify this? The following two chapters are about the lacunae of existing literature on Hong Kong cinema, and reflections on the theoretical paradigms related to the cinema.

"Whenever a theory appears to you as the only possible one, take this as a sign that you have neither understood the theory nor the problem which it was intended to solve."

- Karl Popper

SECTION I

THE CURIOUS CASE OF HONG KONG CINEMA

WHY AND HOW SHOULD WE DEVELOP OUR THEORETICAL MODEL?

Hong Kong cinema was born under unusual circumstances. While other national cinemas at their infant stage were shielded from foreign competition by their state governments, Hong Kong cinema has had to stand on its own since its inception. While Chinese cinema is going through marketization now, at its centenary, Hong Kong cinema was commercial and transnational from its beginning. What is more curious is that Hong Kong cinema has a long history of prolific filmmaking despite British colonization and Hollywood domination. Since the 1920s, Chinese intellectuals have denigrated Hong Kong cinema as mass entertainment devoid of social and aesthetic values from a city they labeled a "cultural desert." But in the 1990s, Hong Kong cinema was transformed into a competitive world-class industry with commercial films succeeding in Western mainstream markets and art films collecting awards in international film festivals. The doomsday of the colony became the heyday of Hong Kong cinema. Hong Kong cinema is an oddity in the world, and it went through its own unique path of development.

Since the 1990s, there has been a surge of scholarly interest in the industry. Much of this literature has adopted Western media or cultural theories, and none of it provides a satisfactory analysis or explanation of the success of Hong Kong cinema. Why are existing theories unable to adequately explain how Hong Kong cinema survived and thrived? Since theory is hypothetical and generated to solve problems that have arisen in specific historical-cultural setting, theories from the West are not completely applicable to Hong Kong cinema, situated as it is in the very different context of the East. Most of the scholarship on Hollywood and Hong Kong cinema has based its analysis on the conceptual framework of the nation-state, a modern concept that has remained the dominant and hegemonic ideological basis of intellectual and academic development. This literature assumes that nationalism is an answer to imperialism and that national cinemas are a defense against Hollywood domination. Hong Kong cinema, situated in a colonial city that is a limbo entity between China and the West, does not fit into either side of the binary opposition and so is a conceptual anomaly that inevitably becomes a theoretical conundrum.

In most scholarship on Hong Kong cinema, there is a misrecognition of the industry as a petite-sized Hollywood or a branch of Chinese cinema. Studies of national cinemas subsume Hong Kong cinema under Chinese cinema; most early studies are atheoretical and over-politicized, while recent studies mechanically apply Western theories and depoliticize Hong Kong cinema. Orientalist studies are informed by theory but often describe the business as chaotic, implying that Hong Kong cinema just muddled through without a system. Some Hong Kong scholars who have received a Western education also overlook Hong Kong cinema's historical specificity and indiscriminately borrow the model of Hollywood or the concept of national cinema. These scholars

perpetuate an intellectual dependency of local scholarship upon Western scholarship and situate Hong Kong cinema in the shadow of the West.

In this dissertation, I will explore theoretical issues in the fields of cultural studies, global media, Hollywood, and film festival research. Even though these disciplines share a parallel move from generality towards specificity, their disconnection from one another hinders the understanding of Hong Kong cinema. Studying the history of Hong Kong cinema with a focus on its industrial aspect is daunting given the scanty research material and available resources. Theorizing the system of Hong Kong cinema is almost impossible without sizable research material. It is not an established path with tested methodologies and theories adapted to local context. The story of Hong Kong cinema is situated in an interstitial culture of a cosmopolitan city; this kind of lived experience is common in East Asia but peculiar to most part of the world. Instead of assuming that one theory can provide a comprehensive explanation of all historical experience and knowledge, I propose the use of localized theories and an integrative approach. I will adopt a bricolage approach, piecing together a methodology that integrates the generalizing approach of political-economy models with the specificity of cultural studies. The following two chapters are literature reviews and theoretical discussions that cover works by media scholars, historians, and literature scholars that range from topics as broad as global media studies to topics as specific as an itinerant scholar's personal view of Hong Kong culture.

Chapter 2 The Blind Men's Moving Elephant

Hong Kong cinema is a century old but systematic documentation and academic study have only just begun. Despite its longevity and popularity, until recently in the public and private sectors it was a nonexistence. Scholarly interest started only in the 1990s and most are textual studies. There is only a handful systematic studies of industrial operations, a far cry from the scope and depth of studies on the Hollywood studio system despite the fact that this petit industry has a long history of prolific filmmaking second only to Hollywood in terms of exports. Outsiders may be curious as to why and how Hong Kong cinema suddenly became so fascinating and came to occupy the international limelight. But for those growing up in Hong Kong, breathing the culture and working in the local media industry, the real concern is why it took scholars so long to take Hong Kong cinema seriously and why, despite being so badly neglected in the past, it was put on a pedestal by the end of the millennium. There seems to be a huge difference in the perspectives on Hong Kong cinema of outsiders and insiders. This brings up the question: what is Hong Kong cinema? It is not global or national. It does not fit easily into existing categories and cannot be neatly defined. It is like the blind men's elephant, meaning different thing to different people. But unlike the stable pachyderm of the original Indian fable, it is a moving elephant. For those who view it from a historical perspective or from a distance through multiple cultural perspectives, the multifaceted and ever-shifting characteristics of Hong Kong cinema will become quickly apparent. This chapter is a literature review on Hong Kong cinema: how it was first defined in negative terms in the past and is misconstrued and praised at present.

INCOGNITO: NEGLECTED BY PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS IN HONG KONG

Until recently, Hong Kong cinema was seriously neglected in the private and public sectors of Hong Kong. Documentation was rare and sporadic, and in the public sector the colonial government had no stated film policy. Local film school education started in the late 1960s, but film education became noticeable only after the rise of the overseas-educated Hong Kong "New Wave" generation in the late 1970s. In the 1980s, there was no course on Hong Kong cinema in college. Local cultural studies were begun in the academy only in the last decade, but film study remains mostly confined to textual readings. Despite the commercial nature of both Hong Kong at large and its film industry, film as business or the operation of the industry was not a course in college.[7] Published memoirs and autobiographies by older veteran filmmakers were limited to the few who were literate[8], outspoken and famous. The Hong Kong Film Archive was only officially opened in 2001. Before that there was no systematic collection and restoration of Hong Kong movies and publications. Most pre-war movies were destroyed during the Japanese occupation, and reels of post-war movies were often lost with the closing down of film companies. The Hong Kong Film Archive's oral history project is an attempt to acquire and save valuable historical information from veteran filmmakers.[9] In 1997, Hong Kong Film Archive began publishing the Hong Kong Filmography series starting with the period of 1913-1941. The series was published in both English and Chinese and documented basic information, but gave no box office data (local or overseas) and no film company or theater chain information. In recent years, the Hong Kong Film Archive has published anthologies on filmmakers, eras and studios,[10] And the Hong Kong International Film Festival started in 1977. The retrospective section of the film festival shows old Hong Kong movies and publishes essays in its annual bilingual (English and Chinese) publication on specific topic. In recent years, there were more essays on

filmmaking practice, especially after the migration of Hong Kong filmmakers to Hollywood in the mid-1990s. Despite these efforts, publication on the industrial or institutional aspects of Hong Kong cinema remained sporadic and piecemeal. In 1996, the Trade Development Council (TDC) of Hong Kong organized a tour to the U.S. with Josephine Siao serving as the cultural ambassador. At the time there was no government film organization and no official documentation of the industry's development except for the crude annual estimate by the Census and Statistics department under a "film entertainment industry" section. In 2001, when Hong Kong film industry was declining, Hong Kong Trade Development Council, inspired by the phenomenal success of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee 2000), published a research paper entitled "The North American Market for Hong Kong Films"[11]. The paper recognizes Hong Kong cinema's competitive edge in the action genre in the U.S. market, but in its adoption of a conventional marketing research approach without any historical perspective or analysis of the industrial system, the report makes clear that the government has no idea how this culture industry truly works.

In the private sector, there were no independent trade journals like those in the U.S. Film Bi-weekly (aka City Entertainment) is the only long-lasting Chinese language local film magazine (1979-2007), offering coverage of the 1980s and 1990s. Industry news and personnel changes were published sporadically by newspapers and there were no local journalists that specialized in covering the field. In the 1990s, due to the petit size[12] and tightly knit social character of the filmmaking community, industry news was mostly circulated informally and orally.[13] The Hong Kong Film Yearbook, published by Hong Kong Kowloon and New Territories Motion Picture Industry Association (MPIA), was founded in 1989 and ran until 1998. It is published in both English and Chinese and documented basic information on the movies released each year including movie

synopses, release dates, cast and crew, production and distribution companies, theater chains, local box office and film awards. Yu Mo-wan, a private collector, started collecting Hong Kong film-related materials on his own long before the local government. His Hong Kong Cinema Chronology series covers Hong Kong cinema from 1896 to 1949, but is only a chronological listing of raw data with no interpretation or analysis. Without footnotes or a bibliography, the series is difficult to use for scholarly research. However Yu's huge collection and donation of film-related publication to Hong Kong Film Archive provide invaluable primary research material for constructing an accurate timeline of the local film industry's history. Scanty material and unverifiable information always pose serious problems for researchers of Hong Kong cinema.

MISRECOGNITION: OFFICIAL AND ACADEMIC STUDIES ON HONG KONG CINEMA

The misrecognition of Hong Kong cinema in scholarly and official publications may be one reason why Hong Kong cinema remained so neglected for so long. For convenience's sake I classify these scholars and their work into four broad categories -- the nationalist, the orientalist, the overseas Chinese scholars, and Hong Kong-based scholars -- though most are more complex and do not fit neatly under one such heading. In the nationalist narrative Hong Kong cinema is a sub-national cinema subsumed under Chinese cinema. While early nationalist studies mostly are not informed by any film industry theory, disregard the commercial system and over-politicize, recent studies in this vein mechanically apply Western economic theories and completely depoliticize the industry. Orientalists are informed by film industry theory but with Hollywood studio system assumed as the standard, Hong Kong cinema often is described as lacking a system and the cottage-like industry is depicted as sub-standard. Some Western-educated Hong Kong scholars also overlook Hong Kong cinema's historical specificity and indiscriminately borrow and apply the Hollywood model or the concept of national

cinema. Such intellectual dependency by local scholars on Western scholarship is intellectually debilitating and places Hong Kong cinema in the shadow of the West. Overseas Chinese scholars, armed with post-colonial theories, problematize essential Chineseness and question Chinese national cinema. Hong Kong-based scholars, educated mostly in the West, have the advantage of growing up with the culture and point out the dual-character of Hong Kong cultural production. These last two groups elucidate the socio-cultural force of Hong Kong cinema as an in-between cinema with no stable definition or status. They ask the reflexive question, "What is Hong Kong cinema?"

Nationalist

If all senses of nationhood are narrativized (Bhabha), so too is the sense of national cinema-hood. In the Cold War-era nationalist narrative, Hong Kong cinema was deemed too colonial and westernized for assimilation. Later the official history of Hong Kong cinema shifted from one extreme to another – from a political inferior pariah to an economic success model. Their approach shifts from Cultural Revolution era practice of binary inclusion-exclusion to Reform Era genealogical hierarchization. Then, in the post-Socialist Era, "It's the economy" became the new political mantra. In line with these successive mindsets, studies on Hong Kong cinema change from a reluctant acceptance of commercialism to total worship of market power. Everything is explained in and reduced to terms of economics.

The first two Chinese film history books from opposite political camps offer extreme examples of how early Chinese film histories were written with a strong political slant. Cheng Jihua et al's The Development History of Chinese Cinema published in China in 1963,[14] covers Chinese cinema from 1896 to 1949. Hong Kong cinema is denounced as regressive and chaotic in the post war years prior to the arrival of the southbound Leftist "progressive" filmmakers. Political labeling is blatant and Hong Kong

commercial entertainment-oriented cinema is disavowed. Under the Communist Party's ideological guidance, the Chinese film history that Cheng et al narrate establishes Leftist cinema as the orthodox, and popular cinema from colonial Hong Kong or Japanese occupied Shanghai is dismissed as periphery. Taiwanese cinema is not mentioned by Cheng, but in Taiwan Tu Yun-chih's Chinese Film History covers cinema in China until 1971. This series won awards in Taiwan and was appreciated by the Cultural Bureau in Taiwan. Tu was born in China, moved to Taiwan and worked for a while at Hong Kong-based Shaw studio. Coming as he does from the opposite political camp, Tu denounces Leftist movies and organizations. But his work fills the gaps left by Cheng Jihua et al, particularly Shanghai cinema during Japanese occupation, postwar Hong Kong Mandarin cinema produced by Shanghai émigrés and Hong Kong cinema's connections with Taiwan and Southeast Asia. The Chinese film history that Tu narrates parallels the movement of the KMT regime: it started in China, branched out in Hong Kong and settled in Taiwan. Taiwanese dialect films, despite their popularity and the fact that the language was spoken by the majority of the island's population, takes up only one chapter (20 pages) among the 29 chapters. Tu describes the dialect film industry as chaotic, lacking in industry planning, aimed at low-class mass audiences from rural areas, having low budgets, sloppy production and poor, uncreative scripts. Dialect films had been produced during Japanese colonization, but were suspended until 1955 following the KMT takeover of Taiwan. Tu gives no reason for the hiatus and does not mention the KMT's language policy, which established Mandarin as the island's only official language. Taiwan films made during Japanese colonization are either dismissed as Japanese political propaganda shoddy productions. Political labeling and demeaning descriptions are common. For example, in the chapter on Taiwanese cinema under Japanese occupation, it states, "In the early days of Japanese occupation of Taiwan, the

culture was low" (3:21:1). It also implies that Taiwan had no culture before the arrival of the KMT regime. The Hong Kong films that Tu includes are exclusively Mandarin films, and Cantonese cinema is mentioned in only a few sentences. Cheng et al and Tu's books are typical of publications of rival political camps in that era, but both regard Mandarin cinema as the orthodox national cinema and view dialect films (Cantonese and Taiwanese) as peripheral and dismissible.

The study of Hong Kong cinema started in China in 1979 after the end of the Cultural Revolution. It began with a few scholars organizing a social group for the study of Taiwanese and Hong Kong cinema. In the introduction to the anthology Eighty Years of Hong Kong Cinema, Cai Hongsheng asserts the significance of studying Hong Kong cinema, saying that since 1913 Hong Kong has produced over 8,000 films, more than Taiwan and "surpasses that of Mainland China, the motherland ("muti")." In Chinese "muti" literally means the mother's body. Cai's conception of the relationship between mainland Chinese cinema and Hong Kong cinema is that of a parent-child hierarchy. The sheer impressive quantity of production may not be the reason that Hong Kong cinema, once labeled as politically inferior, was accepted as a legitimate research topic. As Cai states in the following paragraphs, "Without the study on Hong Kong cinema (and Taiwan cinema), the study of Chinese cinema is incomplete." In contrast to Cheng et al's disavowal of Hong Kong cinema, Cai embraces Hong Kong cinema, but with caution. "The production, distribution and actor systems of Hong Kong cinema are very different from ours. Anyhow, this is an existing social cultural phenomenon…we can borrow their successful experience and beware their defects" (101). Cai's conception of Chinese cinema coincides with the current state guiding principle of a national unitary plan: Taiwan and Hong Kong are parts of China despite their differences. In their Hong-Kong published book, Early History of Hong Kong Cinema (1897-1945), Zhou Chengren and

Li Yizhuang—themselves both natives of Guangzhou (aka Canton), a province that shares its dialect and Southern Chinese culture with Hong Kong—point out the need for a volume on the history of Hong Kong Cinema recognizing its distinctive character and peculiar developmental path. Li began researching on her own in 1982 after being rejected to include Hong Kong cinema as a course at her university. Zhou and Li are meticulous in correcting the factual errors of their predecessors. Like Cai, Zhou and Li also argue that the study of Chinese cinema cannot be considered complete without the inclusion of Hong Kong and Taiwanese films. Their conception of Chinese cinemas is also not one of plurality. These Cantonese scholars' perspective avoids the condescending "Central Plain"[15] view which regards those from China's periphery as inferior;but their conception is also a genealogical hierarchy. While Cai's conception of the relationship between mainland Chinese and Hong Kong cinema is maternal, Zhou and Li's cinematic family tree has branches. In their preface they state, "…in China, researchers limit their scope of study to movies made in China proper. They overlook Hong Kong and Taiwan cinemas which should be included in the studies of Chinese cinema. This is replacing the whole with the principal part ("zhuti")[16], attaching importance to the mainstream and overlooking the branches." Mainland China scholars like Cai, Zhou and Li refer China's cinema as the subject ("muti", "zhuti"), and Hong Kong and Taiwan cinema as branches. In the realm of popular culture, Hong Kong cinema is not simply a variant of China's cinema. The underlying China-centric conception is shown in Zhou and Li's periodization of Hong Kong cinema. Their book was published in 2005, but they end their coverage at 1997, the year Hong Kong's sovereignty returned to China. They conflate political integration with cultural fusion. Neither is the year 1997 necessarily a dividing point in the development of Hong Kong cinema. But the 2003 signing of the Close Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)

may be, since it intensified co-production between China and Hong Kong and shifted Hong Kong cinema's target market mainly to China. Situated in a small cosmopolitan city, Hong Kong cinema has been heavily influenced by multiple international forces and its trajectory is not solely determined by the China factor. Given Guangzhou's "periphery" position in the traditional "Central Plain" Chinese world view, Zhou and Li's reading of a Chinese language cinema outside Mainland China provides an intriguing perspective. On the one hand, they are keen on asserting Hong Kong cinema's distinctiveness as a Cantonese cultural media. On the other, they are keen to emphasize Hong Kong cinema's connection with China's cinema. For example, in their section on KMT government banning of Cantonese dialect films in the 1930s, Zhou and Li, instead of accepting the apparent political reason of national linguistic unity, explore an alternative explanation: the conflict between the Shanghai and Hong Kong film industries. They argue that Shanghai Mandarin cinema's support of the banning actually was a conspiracy to seize the Southern China market where Hong Kong Cantonese films were most popular. Zhou and Li's research is rich in detail on the exchange between Hong Kong and Guangzhou, as well as between Cantonese opera and Cantonese cinema. But they also emphasize the close connection between Hong Kong cinema and China's cinema. Besides the description of involvement of southbound Shanghai filmmakers in Hong Kong cinema, Zhou and Li have a chapter specifically on the exchange between Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Shanghai in 1923-1941. They do not touch upon the international dimension of Hong Kong cinema and this is especially noticeable when compared to works by writers from Hong Kong and other countries. Zhou and Li's perspective on Hong Kong cinema is inward looking and anti-commercialist, counter to the current popular trend of reading Hong Kong and Chinese cinema. While Cai reluctantly accepts the commercialism of Hong Kong cinema as an unavoidable evil,[17]

Zhou and Li are very critical of the commercial and entertainment-oriented aspects.[18] Historically, Southern China has developed regional culture distinctive from that of the North, and Guangzhou had long developed as the preeminent provincial center and the locus of international trade in the centuries before the Western imperialist invasion. Since the 1980s, thanks to China's coastal development strategy to attract capital from Hong Kong and Taiwan, Guangzhou has become one of the fastest growing provinces.[19] Living a prudent life as retired academics in a fast growing coastal province and working on a scholarly project without state support, Zhou and Li's perspective on Hong Kong cinema is distinctive among Chinese intellectuals, particularly amidst the contemporary discourse of market power and China's integration into the world system.

In the Post-Socialist era when "getting on the global track" became China's national goal, Hong Kong, which rose to a world class city under a Western power's administration, became a model unit for China. The conception of an efficient "Hong Kong System" as a mechanism operated in a purely economic (i.e. de-politicized) environment is extended to the study of Hong Kong film industry. In an era when the return of Hong Kong's sovereignty was narrated as a story of national redemption and the national goal was to integrate the developing motherland into global economy, Hong Kong cinema, shamed in the past for its cultural impurity, was now celebrated as a transnational phenomenon. The city was extolled as an East-meets-West hybrid wonderland; an outpost to magnify the nation's international image. Popular and official discourses from the West, Hong Kong and China together contributed to the construction of the "Hong Kong Wonder" myth. Hong Kong as a model city of Chinese cosmopolitanism and the Hong Kong lifestyle as an exemplar of modern living provided Chinese citizens with new values and direction the new age of Chinese consumerism. "Efficient Hong Kong system" and "learning from Hong Kong" were stated or implied in

official discourse. Mainland scholar Wang Xiaoming describes that in the 1980s there was common support and high hope for the state's "Four Modernization" projects among Chinese intellectuals who believed in linear historical progress and national revitalization. Their hopes were dashed in 1989 by the violent crackdown in Tiananmen Square and again in 1992 by Market Economy Reform. The heated debates on "humanism" that followed revealed Chinese intellectuals' predicament of self-identification and their diminished role in national development. They either became frustrated and despaired in face of the overwhelming marketization or went into business themselves. Chinese scholars coined the term "shiyu", or "loss of speech," to describe the loss of voice or lack of critical perspective in the academy. They either remained silent or parroted what the others say. The loss of centralized value and the popularity of? Mao Zedong's icon in the 1990s is described by Mainland China scholar Dai Jinhua as "consumerism with Chinese characteristics." While in the post-World War II years China posited itself as the leader of the Third World against Western imperialists and Mao Zedong was idolized as leader of national redemption on the road to Socialist Nirvana, in the Post-Socialist Era Hong Kong was idealized as a model city of Modernization to spearhead China's capitalist-style economic reform. During his 1992 Southern China Tour Chinese late leader Deng Xiaoping affirmed the region's economic progress and promised not only to quicken the pace of economic reform, but also to build more cities in China modeled after Hong Kong. Western media and academia also played a role in consolidating the image of Hong Kong as a role model. Andrew Scobell's[20] 1988 article "Hong Kong's influence on China: the tail that wags the dog?" exemplifies Western scholars' optimistic view of Hong Kong's significance and impact on China in the 1980s. Scobell not only lists and extols Hong Kong's massive economic contributions to China, he thinks that this colonial city, along with Mainland Chinese intellectuals, was in a key

position to propel China's political reform. Referring to Hong Kong's unique system of consultative bodies and referendums on issues of broad public concern, Scobell writes, "Should such a system prove workable in Hong Kong, it could become appealing to Chinese intellectuals who feel that China needs political reforms that permit greater democracy in order to become a truly advanced country. It may also be attractive to the CCP [Chinese Communist Party], which might find the 'Hong Kong system' moderate enough to implement on the Mainland" (32-33). Scobell's "Hong Kong system", which he describes as "the prototype for a limited and distinctly Chinese form of democracy or consultation in government" (32) is the colonial government's policy of soft authoritarianism in the late colonial era. Robert E. Mitchell calls the final 30 years' of British administration "Velvet Colonialism." The colonial government faced serious challenge to their legitimacy in the 1966-1967 riots and softened their governing approach in order to maintain their rule. The administration redefined anti-colonial activities in the mid-1960s as a non-political issue. They framed it as people's livelihood issue and implemented various measures to improve the economy and living standards. Even American politicians overlooked Hong Kong's colonial status in their understanding of "Hong Kong system". In their respective Republican presidential and vice-presidential campaigns in 1996, Steve Forbes pitched a Hong Kong–style income tax regime and Jack Kemp's idea of turning Washington D.C into an enterprise zone was dubbed "Hong Kong on the Potomac". As Hong Kong scholar C. K. Lau points out, both candidates overlooked the fact that execution of this economic policy depends on the lack of democratic election: "For the truth is that the successful implementation of Hong Kong's economic policy under British rule has had much to do with its status as a colony, which was run by civil servants who did not need to worry about pleasing an electorate to remain in power" (83). Hong Kong's economic miracle may not be a blessing to local

citizens, as C. K. Lau laments: "…over time Hong Kong's economic prosperity, despite the absence of democracy, has given rise to a view that the colony's governmental system has been a crucial factor in its success…It holds that Hong Kong's formula for success comprises three elements: no democracy, laissez-faire, and little welfare" (32). Hong Kong scholars also played a role in the construction of "the de-politicized efficient Hong Kong system". In "Spinning Colonialism to Managerialism" Law Wing-sang ("Spinning")critiques certain Hong Kong scholars' justification of the colonial governmental system through managerial efficiency.[21] The notion of Hong Kong government's peculiar "colonial democracy" being unique and valuable was so influential that in the Sino-British Talk it was asserted that after Hong Kong detached from its colonizer its colonial governmental features would be retained. Situated in such a capitalist fairy-tale city, the Hong Kong film industry is no less mythologized. Every year in China numerous books and scholarly articles mechanically borrow pure economic theories to explain the commercial system of Hong Kong cinema. Regional politics, government policy and censorship are completely omitted in their descriptions, as if colonial administration was not an issue and Hong Kong filmmakers operated in a political vacuum. The nationalists' description of Hong Kong cinema tells us more about political climate in China and Chinese intellectual's loss of critical perspective than about what Hong Kong cinema is and how it works. Nationalist scholars did not ask the fundamental question, "What is Hong Kong cinema?"

Orientalist

The Orientalist brand is theory informed but tends to use Hollywood as its standard. In their description, Hollywood's position as a global cinematic giant located in a superpower country is never reconciled with the difficulties of Hong Kong's film industry, a transnational cinema in an open economy that could not exclude external actor

from a domestic authority structure. Some Hong Kong scholars intend to affirm Hong Kong cinema but inadvertently end up diminishing it by mechanically applying Western theory.

Hong Kong historian Chung Po-yin, in her book One Hundred Year's of Hong Kong Cinema is keen on understanding the commercial system and exploring the international dimension of Hong Kong cinema. The title of her opening chapter "Film as a commercial product" sets the tone of the book. In the first paragraph Chung clearly asserts that "film is a transnational commercial product." Chung, born and raised in Hong Kong and with a Ph.D. from the UK, weaves the hundred-year history of Hong Kong cinema into a coherent narrative—a first of its kind. As a history major with special interests in South China's society and economy, Chung richly contextualizes the film industry in its specific political and economic milieu and meticulously details the connections of its power players. She gives an impressive overview of Hong Kong cinema in historical connection with the East and the West. However there is no textual or formal analysis, nor does it describe any cultural dimension of the films or their production. In short, Chung does not factor in cultural and aesthetic forces in the operation of Hong Kong film industry. Chung's work exemplifies the continual problem of segregation between the political economy and cultural studies approaches in film studies in Hong Kong. Her understanding of how the system of commercial cinema works is mechanical, marking this cultural industry no different in theory from other material industries. As she states at the outset, "The competition of film is not just about the quality of films. The fiercest battle actually is at the distribution and exhibition sectors….however well made a movie, without the distribution and exhibition channel, it cannot escape being a money loser"(*One Hundred Years* 14). Her conception of the business operation focuses only on control and market. In the introductory chapter, using

Hollywood in the classical era exclusively as the reference model, Chung asserts that Hollywood studios' system of vertical integration that combined production, distribution and exhibition is "extremely effective for market control" (*One Hundred Years* 18). In her previous work on MP & GI studio she makes the same assertion about the Hollywood studio system ("Tycoon"). Then she goes on to describes that, "in Chinese cinema, Motion Pictures and General Investment Film Co (MP & GI) was a typical attempt to adopt vertical integration in Asia" ("Tycoon" 36). MP & GI declined with the accidental death of its owner in 1964, and Shaw studio gave way to the independent Golden Harvest in the 1970s. Chung describes hot money, instead of being a means saving the industry, as a disruptive force to the established production-distribution order. The history of Hong Kong cinema that Chung narrates is one which assumes the studio system as the norm and order and independent production as the interim or temporary. But in the 1990s there was no monopoly of the market, concentration of power and the bureaucracy of the studio has long faded and no studios lasted long. If Hollywood is the standard, then the failure to adopt vertical integration is synonymous with the failure of the industry. But Chung's argument cannot explain why Hong Kong cinema is long-lasting despite the lack of long-lived studios. It cannot explain why Hong Kong cinema thrived in the international market in the 1990s, an era characterized not by tight control of the market and vertically integrated studios but by small and medium-scale independent productions. By assuming Hollywood studio system as the standard, Chung inadvertently depicts Hong Kong cinema as an incompetent imitator.

While Hong Kong historian Chung Po-yin mechanically applies Western theory, American film scholar David Bordwell separates the theory in the West and cultural practice in the East. In Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment, he did not analyze how the system of Hong Kong cinema works despite the fact that he is

recognized for his seminal work analyzing the system of Hollywood (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson). Nevertheless, Planet Hong Kong is vigorously researched and Bordwell is perceptive to recognize certain characteristics of Hong Kong cinema, for example, it was a director-centric cinema; the film companies are generally of small to medium scale; the source of financing is the bamboo network—overseas Chinese communities; films were funded much like independent productions, without lengthy bureaucratic procedures or bank loans. Instead of weaving the development of Hong Kong cinema into a coherent narrative, he organizes the book around directors. But he does not go beyond description and explain why Hong Kong cinema did not evolve into a producer system, the implications of Hong Kong cinema's special mode and source of financing, or why this seemingly crude financing practice is endures despite the sophistication of Hong Kong economy and the expansion of Hong Kong film business in the world. In short, he makes no attempt to study why the system of Hong Kong cinema works. In his collaborative book on the Hollywood studio system he analyzes the connection between structure and text; that is, how the mode of production influences film style and thus how the system regenerates itself. But in his book on Hong Kong cinema, he fondly relishes the film style and describes the productions without applying his own theory to connect the two. Instead, he reasserts that in terms of market share "Hollywood of the East is Hollywood", not Hong Kong (*Planet Hong Kong* 82-83). The significance of Hong Kong cinema lies not in the size of its market or industry, but in its ability to survive and tell local stories. Bordwell only includes directors whose movies are more accessible in the American market with the exception of Wong Jing, the top box office director at the time of his research. Wong Jing's movies might not be accessible to Western audience, but they are formalized: uniform style and standardized storytelling. Bordwell's descriptions are thorough, but the book is full of funny chaotic anecdotes about messy subtitling, the

frantic method of filmmaking and the yo-yo pattern of a film company's development. It gives the impression that the industry just muddled through for one hundred years.

Michael Curtin proposes a groundbreaking concept of city cinema that averts the problems of national cinema paradigm. He applies it in his book Playing to the World's Biggest Audience – The Globalization of Chinese Film and TV. Curtin's observation is exceptionally insightful and relevant to the rising cinemas in the region, and must be discussed at length here. Curtin analyzes objective factors—logic of accumulation, trajectories of creative migration and forces of socio-cultural variation—that enable certain cities to emerge as centers of cultural production. His answer to the question "why do some places become centers of cultural production?" is location and timing: the media industry located at the right place at the right time. However, in the application of his theory on Hong Kong film industry, Curtin assumes that the difference between Hollywood and Hong Kong cinema is just a quantitative one: Hong Kong cinema is a not yet fully-expanded version of Hollywood. By assuming size is an advantage, he is led to conclude that while Hollywood has the biggest studio at the production end, Chinese media industries have the biggest audience at the reception end. However, Hong Kong cinema had neither big studios nor a big audience. In the 1990s, when it was most spreading in the world, Hong Kong cinema did not have full access to audiences in China due to the mainland's foreign quota restriction (this ended in 2003 with the signing of CEPA). It had been lucrative since the introduction of sound in the 1930s, but its popularity was limited to Cantonese speaking audiences in Southern China and overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and North America. In the period Curtin covers (mostly post war years to 2000) it never had the advantage he claims. In contrast to Hollywood, Hong Kong cinema globalized not by expanding the size of the industry but has since the 1980s moved towards streamlining. Curtin conflates development with

expansion, assuming the goal of other media capitals is also to expand the size of their film industry (like Hollywood). Without considering the structural constraints of a culture industry operating in a colony or the volatile regional environment, Curtin reads Hong Kong cinema's streamlining as a dysfunctional maladjustment instead of a practical survival strategy. The history of Hong Kong cinema that Curtin narrates is one of a film industry going downhill as it further deviates from the Hollywood model. Curtin starts chapter one with Shaw Studio, as if Hong Kong's commercial transnational cinema began there. But Hong Kong cinema was commercial and transnational since its inception, and independent production was the norm rather than the exception.

In the second chapter on Hong Kong independent studios during the 1970s to 1980s Curtin lists the flaws in business practices such as a non-transparent financing system, decision making based on hunches or on the basis of limited information, sloppy bookkeeping, lack of tracking overseas ticket sales, and deal making based on personal allegiance instead of shopping around in a competitive market—to name a few. He calls these practices "mercantile capitalism", an operation relying on personal relationships. To Curtin the Hong Kong film industry, unlike Hollywood, did not graduate to "industrial capitalism" which "predicated on a managerial revolution that tends to create distinction between owners and managers…minimize the importance of personality and to regularize the return on capital through the establishment of rational systems at each link in the chain…" Curtin goes on to lament that, "Although the Hong Kong movie industry during the 1970s and 1980s happily appropriated element of Hollywood's poststudio mode of disintegrated production, it also retained many features of mercantile capitalism, and this has proven to be a crucial *weakness* of the industry…the industry's *inability* to institute transparent practices that might regularize production, distribution, and financing, allowing the film companies to grow in scale…" (*Playing* 67, emphasis mine). In sum,

Curtin sees chaos and defects. To him reliance on personality is a problem and a sign of weakness. Filmmaking is inherently a high risk business due to the unpredictability of trend and taste. The risk was higher in a small city with an unprotected open economy, and much more so in the decades of changing sovereignty when the city was in a political limbo under a lame duck government. In a city facing an uncertain future with no paved runway, crash landings are the norm. During a crisis experienced pilots and crew members provide the needed flexibility and assurance. Personality counts. Curtin's suggestion of expanding film companies at the production end but ignoring securing bigger markets at the reception end also fails to reducing risk. Curtin does not see that in the system of Hong Kong cinema flexibility is advantageous and reliance on personality is strength.

In chapter three, "Hyperproduction erodes overseas circulation," Curtin attributes the decline of Hong Kong film industry to overproduction and a decline in quality. However, he does not give hard data and market analysis to explain how much is too much or specify the criteria of quality production. In his analysis, Hong Kong cinema's lack of forward motion is due more to Hong Kong filmmakers' expansion-inhibiting behavior than to structural impediments. It is their dysfunctional maladjustment which holds the Hong Kong film industry back. Curtin infers that while the success of Hong Kong cinema was due to objective structural factors such as the city's status as a financial center and its concentration of production resources, its failure was due to subjective factors like mismanagement. However the 1990's is the decade in which Hong Kong cinema won more international film awards than ever and produced films with high enough quality to enter competitive Western mainstream markets. As detailed in later chapters of this dissertation, the greatest contributor to Hong Kong cinema's survival is people, whether are resourceful producers, entrepreneurial directors or humble writers. It

is the location and occasion that provide a favorable environment for the gathering of media capital, but it is the people factor that keeps the industry flexible and maintains its creative competitive edge. In regards to the question "What is Hong Kong cinema?" Curtin is sharp in distinguishing Hong Kong cinema as a city cinema, but he does not see that it is a "people's cinema". In this petit Chinese filmmaking colony with only about one thousand active members there is always a heavy reliance on personality and close interpersonal relationships.

In his media capital model, Curtin asserts Hollywood as "a global media capital par excellence" and the sole occupant of the top tier of a four level media agglomeration hierarchy. He overlooks Hong Kong's status as a dependent territory and this factor alone can fatally hamper the city from ever becoming a powerful global media capital; it is a potential challenge to its sovereign state's authority, whether it is the illegitimate British colonial government or the one-party Chinese government keen on "building harmonious society". Curtin is unaware of Hong Kong's colonial politics and cultural policy and that can be seen in his description of the role of the colonial government: "…the city's relative political stability and the colonial government's benign neglect of Chinese media industries provided artistic freedom that seemed likely to endure for some time, unlike the prospects for Singapore or Taipei" (*Playing* 270-71). Curtin seems to get caught up in the British imperialist narrative of tranquility of colonization. In fact, Hong Kong cinema was always under the watchful eyes of censors despite the official rhetoric of "active non-intervention policy". The "benign neglect" remark is particularly odd coming from Curtin, who analyzed the role of government in shaping the film industry in a democracy like the U.S. In his article "Beyond the Vast Wasteland: the Policy Discourse of Global Television and the Politics of American Empire", Curtin analyses the context of the renowned "wasteland speech" by FCC chair Newton Minow and points out the key role

of the U.S. government in creating a market-driven system ("Beyond"). He coins the phrase “official internationalism” to describe the U.S.'s unstated media policy and analyses how U.S. economic and foreign policy influenced U.S. broadcast policy. However, in his application of media capital theory on Hong Kong cinema he emphasizes geography at the expense of politics. It is striking that Curtin could read politics and find the unstated media policy of the television industry in a democracy like the U.S. but did not do so with colonial Hong Kong's film industry. The extreme apolitical character of Hong Kong entertainment movies is symptomatic of the extremely political nature of the industry. The Orientalists are theory-informed, but the theories assert supremacy of Hollywood system rather than enlightening us to the system of Hong Kong cinema.

In the nationalists’ genealogical view and the Orientalists hierarchical view Hong Kong cinema is framed as the subordinate Others. In the writing of Leftist Chinese scholars from China's closed-door period like Cheng et al, Hong Kong cinema becomes the politically inferior Other due to Hong Kong's colonial status. In Rightist scholarly writings from KMT-ruled Taiwan like those of Tu, Hong Kong cinema becomes the socially inferior Other due to dialect. In the writings of the open-door-policy generation, like Cai, Zhou and Li, Hong Kong cinema becomes the culturally or aesthetically inferior Other because it is commercial. In the Hong Kong scholar Chung’s writing, Hong Kong cinema becomes the economically inferior Other because it does not have lasting integrated studios. In American film scholar Bordwell’s view, the industry is anarchic. In media scholar Curtin’s eyes, Hong Kong cinema is stuck in the second tier due to over-reliance on personality. By regarding Hong Kong cinema either as an adjunct of mainland Chinese cinema or a lesser version of Hollywood these scholars have limited their comprehension of the fact that local practice is indeed an indication of adaptive difference, not a sign of inability to fall in line with their expectations. With the

assumption of a unified standard of modernity, the nationalists see Hong Kong's transnational cinema as a proven case of modernity with Chinese flavor, a model for national redemption. To the Orientalists Hong Kong cinema is a second-tier version of Hollywood. By adopting the other's beauty standards, Hong Kong cinema is either overrated as a swan or underrated as an ugly duck. Straddling multiple cultures, overseas Chinese scholars and Hong Kong-based scholars educated in the West avoid this singleminded perspective and see the dual character of Hong Kong cinema.

Overseas Chinese scholars

Overseas Chinese scholars tackle the national cinema paradigm, challenge the notion of a monolithic China and assert the distinctiveness of Hong Kong cinema. Yingjin Zhang's Chinese National Cinema, which covers films produced in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, is an impressive archival work. Zhang points out the inadequacy of the national cinema paradigm in understanding Chinese cinema, which is "'fundamentally dispersed' – historically, politically, territorially, culturally, ethnically and linguistically" (3). However, despite his lengthy discussion of the problems in defining the term "Chinese", Zhang does not go beyond instructing the readers to "keep in mind all problematic or messiness (of the term Chinese)– theoretical as well as geopolitical – surrounding 'China' and 'Chineseness'" (5) to explain why he keeps using the term "Chinese national cinema" instead of another pluralistic term. He aims at constructing a complete, all-inclusive picture of Chinese cinema. He states, "…we must be patient and willing to conduct primary research and complete the *constructive* phase of film historiography before we can proceed with deconstruction and reconstruction in any confident, meaningful way" (12, original emphasis). In his archival efforts Zhang leaves out many types of film production other than those of feature films and yet says, "These imbalances, however, do not impact the overall picture of Chinese cinema narrated in the

following chapters. As new archival material surfaces, a more *comprehensive* history will surely arrive to further our knowledge of Chinese cinema in all its diversity and complexity" (12, emphasis mine). He does not explain why those omissions and imbalances will not impact the overall picture or even distort our view. He assumes that the history of Chinese national cinema is a history of narrative cinema. His goal of constructing a more comprehensive history depends on the availability of archival material. But archiving is another touchy issue involving state policies, public and private collectors, money and politics in deciding what to restore or neglect as well as what to include or exclude given limited resources. His inclusion and exclusion of territories is also confusing. On page one he writes, "China today consists of three territories" referring to Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. He includes Taiwan, a former Japanese colony at present not officially integrated into China, but excludes Macau, a former Portuguese colony, which was already officially integrated into China as of 1999. The first and last European colony in China, Macau used to enjoy a high level of autonomy under Portuguese administration and is now also governed under the "one country two systems" principle. Along Zhang's line of logic the omission of Macau should not impact our overall picture of the nation. Macau may not have impressive film industry with which to project its image to the world, but it having overtaken Las Vegas as the world's number one gambling market is a significant sign of the extent of China's incorporation of capitalism. This affirms the Chinese government's commitment to a capitalist style of economic reform and has significant implications for its policy on marketization of the Chinese film industry and the types of films encouraged.

In opposite to Zhang's explicit questioning of national cinema paradigm, Yingchi Chu in Hong Kong Cinema – Coloniser, Motherland and Self adopts it. Referencing Crofts and O'Regan's interpretation of the paradigm, she agrees that national cinema

responds to Hollywood domination in the world market and operates under the rules and standards set by Hollywood. It creates a space nationally and internationally for non-Hollywood film-making. Chu argues that Hong Kong cinema exhibits many characteristics of a national cinema and concludes that it is a "quasi-national cinema". Paradoxically, by applying the national cinema paradigm and creating the term "quasi-national cinema" - a cinema which is neither like Hollywood and Hollywood-dominated cinema, nor exactly a national cinema - she is able to assert the distinctiveness of Hong Kong cinema. With regards to the question "What is Hong Kong cinema?" Chu exposes the inadequacy of existing categories to define it. In the chapters on history she reveals the ameboid character of Hong Kong cinema: over the years Hong Kong cinema changes its identity and outlook as the political situation changed and its target markets shifted. Before China closed its doors in the mid-1950s, Hong Kong cinema was a sub-national regional cinema, a part of Chinese national cinema. From the mid-1950s to 1979, before Hong Kong's economy took off, Hong Kong cinema was a Chinese Diaspora cinema since it depended heavily on overseas Chinese communities. From 1979 to 1997, with power structure between Britain, China and Hong Kong altered, Hong Kong became a distinctive community with high degree of autonomy atypical of a colony (Chu argues that Hong Kong at that time was a "quasi-nation"). Chu concludes that "Hong Kong cinema as a distinct cinema in its own right" (xvii). By exploring the triangular relationship between Britain, China and Hong Kong, Chu identifies Hong Kong's evolving political economic context as the key determinant of the mode of Hong Kong's film industry.

While Chu hangs onto the concept of national cinema, Stephen Teo, himself an overseas Chinese, is particularly responsive to the Diaspora sensitivity in Hong Kong cinema. In Hong Kong Cinema – The Extra Dimensions (*Hong Kong Cinema*) he

proposes the concept of non-territorial based cultural nationalism and attributes Bruce Lee's appeal to Chinese audiences to this sentiment (Lee was born and educated in the United States). It is "an emotional wish among Chinese people living outside China to identify with China and things Chinese, even though they may not have been born there or speak its national language or dialects" (*Hong Kong Cinema* 111). Teo argues that Hong Kong filmmakers were in a unique position to show abstract loyalty to China because Hong Kong is not or does not claim to be a country. He says the sentiment on Hong Kong screen is an "abstract and apolitical type of nationalism" based on double denial - dislike of China's communism and distrust of Britain. However, Teo's book is more descriptive than analytical or theoretical and he does not further explain the term "cultural nationalism."

While Teo takes pride in Hong Kong cinema's transcendental position of double denial, Poshek Fu studies Hong Kong cinema's interstitial position of double marginalization. In contrast to Zhang's attempt to construct a total Chinese national cinema, Fu's works focus on the margins. His reconstructs and rewrites the history of wartime cinemas in Shanghai and Hong Kong, which have been peripheralized or in the official narrative of the history of Chinese cinema. Fu illustrates how Shanghai cinema, even under the Japanese militarists' watchful eye, managed to produce popular and patriotic films ("Struggle"), and how Hong Kong popular cinema, even at the peak of patriotism during the Sino-Japanese war in China, showed ambivalence towards the motherland ("Between Nationalism"). In contrast to Zhang's dismissal of worries about imbalance and omissions, Fu continues his mission to de-construct "Chinese cinema" and recover the suppressed voice in history in Between Shanghai and Hong Kong – The Politics of Chinese Cinemas. He finds that since the 1990s Chinese Studies scholars have begun to take film seriously, but that some of the approaches are problematic. His

childhood experience of the unequal coexistence of Cantonese films and diasporic Mandarin cinema in Hong Kong leads him to question the conception of Chinese cinema with monolithic, essentialist implications that suppress the plurality of cinematic sites and traditions. Fu's pluralistic view goes beyond Teo's binary notion of Diaspora cinema versus Chinese cinema. To Fu, Hong Kong cinema is one of multiple Chinese language cinemas.

Rey Chow in "Between Colonizers: Hong Kong's postcolonial self-writing in the 1990s" also positions Hong Kong between British colonialism and Chinese nationalism. While Fu tries to recover repressed history, Chow argues that "Hong Kong's postcoloniality is marked by a double impossibility" (153) referring to the futility of Hong Kong's quest for a Chinese identity and the illusion of liberatory postmodern hybridity. On the one hand, due to its inerasable colonial taint, the more Hong Kong tries to seek its cultural roots, "the more it reveals its lack of 'Chineseness,' and the more it is a deviation from the norm of the folk. The past would follow Hong Kong like an unshakable curse of inferiority" (163). On the other hand "(t)he enormous seductiveness of the postmodern hybridite's discourse lies … in its invitation to join the power of global capitalism by flattening out past injustices" (157). Chow's in-betweenness discourse provides a useful analytical tool to bring to the foreground the denied presence of Hong Kong cultural identity. While arguing for a third space between the colonizer and the dominant native culture Chow asks an interesting rhetorical question: "…in being a colony, is Hong Kong not in fact a paradigm of Chinese urban life in the future?...Hong Kong has for the past 150 years lived in the forefront of 'Chinese' consciousness of 'Chinese' modernity…" (158). The notion of Hong Kong, being a modern Chinese city, is a subversive force to China is picked up by Leo Ou-fan Lee on his observation of Chinese cosmopolitanism.

While Fu and Chow are pessimistic in tone, Leo Ou-fan Lee cheerily embraces Hong Kong's peculiar marginality. He notices that Hong Kong eventually reversed the cultural impact from China and Britain. In exploring the historical context of Hong Kong's hybrid culture, he illustrates how this marginal city provides a fertile ground for a vibrant popular cinema. He attributes Hong Kong cinema's appeal to Chinese cosmopolitanism and projects Hong Kong as a harbinger of the 21st century city. In "A preliminary study of the marginality of Hong Kong culture," he sees the significance of Hong Kong's marginal culture challenging the center ("Preliminary"). In Chinese history Hong Kong is an important littoral city in relation to the heartland. In modern time reforms started mostly from the coastal and were gradually adopted by the center and became legitimized. For years the hybridized culture in the coastal cities was despised by the Chinese Communists until the Reform Era. For almost a hundred years in the late 19th and mid-20th century Hong Kong, under the shadow of both Shanghai and British colonization, did not have a distinctive identity. The intellectuals of May Fourth movement (1919), positing themselves as the voice of the nation, had no genuine interest in Hong Kong culture or history. After 1949, while Hong Kong was situated between the Communist regime in China and the KMT regime in Taiwan, Lee notices that it became a sort of "public space" for expressing opinions that were censored by the competing Chinese governments. n Hong Kong intellectuals do not posit themselves as the voice of the people, and there is no ingrained distinction between elitist culture and popular culture. Lee argues that Hong Kong, situated at the margin, constantly re-invents itself, challenges the center and changes the culture of the mainland instead of playing the role of a weak minority. In In Search of Hong Kong Culture, he explores the Chinese-ness of the culture and cosmopolitan character of the city (*In Search*). He writes that given the British colonialism's emphasis on economy (as different from French colonialism on

culture) and Hong Kong's deep roots in Chinese culture, any invading foreign culture would eventually be "sino-nized". He predicted that after 1997 Hong Kong would not simply transition from colonialism to nationalism because both are models of the 20th century. He observes that nationalism is the flip side of colonialism, since nation-state is a product of Western modernization and national independence is a result of colonial invasion. He argues that Hong Kong after World War II, though politically still a colony, had already surpassed that status in terms of economy, society and culture. He optimistically predicted that Hong Kong, which had been a metropolitan city since the 1970s, would be one of those post-capitalism international cities which are equals to or even surpass nations in the 21st century. In City Between Worlds – My Hong Kong published in 2008, Lee further explores the specialness of Hong Kong a decade after its change in sovereignty. While Rey Chow is apprehensive about Hong Kong's double impossibility in self-writing, Leo Lee embraces the locals' creativity in inventing history in order to claim their histories as distinct from the colonial record before their political fate as part of China was sealed. Locals could only uncover fragment of a dismembered past, but colonial historians had the advantage of massive official archives to support their construction of a coherent "master narrative". Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s is as Lee describes, "As if to compensate for their obvious disadvantage, creative writers rose to the occasion by inventing their own imaginative histories of the city" (*City Between* 18). Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s illustrates this peculiar third local self-writing and we shall see in chapter seven Tsui Hark's *Once Upon A Time in China* series is the best example of such buoyant creative history writing even though the story is set at time when the country was on the verge of disintegration due to the double threat of foreign invasion and government corruption. In regard to the question "What is Hong Kong

cinema?" Lee's answer would be: it is a subversive cinema in a city of peculiar marginality.

Hong Kong-based scholars

While Leo Lee sees the double subversiveness and Rey Chows sees the double impossibility, Hong Kong-based scholar Marana May Szeto calls attention to the double positioning of Hong Kong in mainstream cultural imaginary. She points out how Rey Chow's discursive strategy of double impossibility can backfire, "… these studies end up assisting in the simulation and stigmatization of what culture can be for different subjects and communities in Hong Kong. In the process, voices that do not fall into these set categories would be elided and silenced" (259-60). She proposes a counterintuitive concept, "Petit-grandiose Hong Kongism" which is "a kind of inferiority-superiority response to Hong Kong's coloniality." She describes it as "a kind of Hong Kong inferiority complex developed under multiple colonial experiences, both British and Chinese. It is expressed in mainstream Hong Kong culture in terms of an economic chauvinism often with sexist and even xenophobic overtones, especially against economically disadvantaged people and places in China." Hong Kong's relation to China is imagined in two opposite directions: the northbound cultural imaginary and the southbound cultural imaginary. The northbound refers to "Hong Kong's mainstream cultural imaginary that posits its claim to cosmopolitanism and capitalist expertise as a justification for an implied economic and cultural expansion towards China. People sharing this imaginary identify Hong Kong as capitalist entity."[22] The southbound cultural imaginary is "resentful of a real and imagined Chinese cultural snobbery against Hong Kong, and fearful of a real and imagined threat from an imposing Chinese political regime. Hong Kong's popular cultural imaginary bears a grudge against Chinese people's claim to cultural authenticity and superiority against the once colonized people of Hong

Kong."(256-57)[23] Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s illustrates this double positioning, and Wong Jing's *God of Gamblers* series is the best example of Petit-grandiose Hong Kongism. His gambler protagonist, an honorable man in a base profession, is an embodiment of this inferiority-superiority complex. In regard to the question "What is Hong Kong cinema?" Szeto's response would be ambivalent.

Hong Kong-based scholars Law Wing-sang goes beyond ambivalence. In Re-theorizing Colonial Power he questions the state's monopoly on political allegiance, explores the issue of double political allegiance that characterizes Hong Kong history and concludes that Hong Kong identity is a performance ("Spinning"). He uses the 1980s-1990s popular genre "undercover cop" to illustrate the complexity of Hong Kong's identity crisis. In the early colonial years the British-groomed native gentlemen were bi-lingual bi-cultural elitists who were loyal to both the British Empire and the Qing Court. In the following century both Britain and China insisted on maintaining Hong Kong's colonial status in order to serve the interests of both nations despite multiple occasions for China to take back Hong Kong before 1997. Law calls this "collaborative colonialism" and thinks it is this condition that deters Hong Kong from forming political subjectivity. In the 1970s the local-born generation rejected the previous generation's political dogma and explored Hong Kong's position in this complex and overlapping political and cultural imaginary. Cinema became a medium to express their unique perspective on identity conflict, and the Hong Kong New Wave generation is known for their local-oriented perspective. Law traces the development of the genre from the early 1980s when the undercover cop was a tragic hero caught between the modern law and traditional moral code. During the late 1980s and early 1990s the undercover cop becomes marginalized and the moral rectitude of the grand narrative of the nation is dismissed in the "big-timer" genre. By the 1990s whatever being labeled as symptomatic

of the "Lack" of Hong Kong culture in the past, such as "vulgarity", was overturned and celebrated as the reason for Hong Kong's success. Stephen Chow's undercover cop is no longer a tragic hero tortured by identity crisis, but a clownish character who explicitly says that an undercover cop is just a permanent actor. Law argues that by foregrounding the performance-based nature of identity, this version of undercover cop creates a new consciousness of the Hong Kong people's subjectivity; hiding one's real identity is not necessarily negative, since the so called "real identity" is also just a performance. In regard to the question "What is Hong Kong cinema?" Law's answer would go further than Chu's quasi-national cinema and description of an ameboid industry. He would conclude that Hong Kong cinema is a performance. As we shall see in chapter eight Wong Kar Wai's productions are characterized by ambivalent schizophrenic bi-racial, bi-cultural, bi-lingual, bi-gender, bi-sexual characters and cast.

Doubleness of Hong Kong cinema

Hong Kong cinema is not a national cinema and its audience is not exactly national citizenry. Poshek Fu and David Desser in the introduction of their anthology on Hong Kong cinema write that Hong Kong cinema is "a cinema without a nation, a local cinema with transnational appeal." In Nation and Nationalism while discussing nationalism as a theory of political legitimacy Ernest Gellner points out that even though nations are a contingency and not a universal necessity, in our age the idea of the nation seems so universal and normative that "(a) man must have a nationality as he must have a nose and two ears." And, "(a) man without a nation defies the recognized categories and provokes revulsion" (6). To apply to Hong Kong, the returning of the city to the motherland is like giving the Hong Kong people unnecessary implants of a nose and two ears. Those with double nationalities or double political allegiances, then, resemble a cubist Picasso portrait with extra ears and eyes set at all angles. Given Hong Kong's

unique historical double allegiance, Hong Kong cinema is like a moving elephant captured in a Picasso painting, puzzling to both the blind and the sighted. This city is a fertile ground for producing crisscross double undercover genre (undercover cop and undercover gangster). In the 1990s the theme of doubleness ran through Hong Kong movies from commercial hits to art film fare: John Woo's paradoxical good bad guy and bad good guy; Jackie Chan's Hong Kong police officer caught between two sides of the law; Tsui Hark's regional hero dealing with the double problems of foreign invasion and imperial court corruption; Wong Kar Wai's tête-bêche narrative structure; Indeed, the 1990s are a prime vantage point to study the doubleness of Hong Kong culture.

In the eyes of the British colonizer, Western media and nationalists, Hong Kong was often reduced to an economic city. For those studying Hong Kong from the center harboring the notions of everlasting empire, the dominant nation-state, the eternal China or essential Chinese-ness, it would be hard to understand why Hong Kong cinema thrives on chaos, confusion, contradiction, and transience and survives for a century. As we shall see, in the 1990s Hong Kong popular cinema served as one of those machines that communicate local memories not fully articulated in the pages of official history. Hong Kong is a unique place and Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s is a prime vantage point to see multiple forces such as colonialism, nationalism, cosmopolitanism and globalism at work. While globalization heightens our interdependence and renders insulated national cinema unfeasible, the goal of being a global cinema is obviously unachievable for most countries without comparable material power like that of the U.S. In existing theories, Hong Kong cinema is an anomaly; but in practice it is not so much of an exception, as is seen in the rise of other Asian cinemas crossing over to Western mainstream markets and in the proliferation of pan-Asian co-productions. If Hong Kong cinema does not fit

neatly into existing categories, what kind of theoretical tools do we need to understand the system of Hong Kong cinema?

Chapter 3 The Duckling's Reflection

Hong Kong cinema is often mistakenly consigned to the shadows of Hollywood or mainland Chinese cinema. A cosmopolitan border town, Hong Kong cinema has been influenced by international forces. Its system is not a simple imitation of Hollywood's, nor is its trajectory determined solely by mainland China. Still, the industry has often perceived as sub-standard and its films as sub-national. When measured by the beauty standard of the others, Hong Kong cinema has either been overrated as a miraculous swan or belittled as a hopeless ugly duck. To paraphrase Schatz's affirmation of the ingenuity of Hollywood studio system that he quotes from Bazin I would say, "Why not admire in Hong Kong cinema what is most admirable, the beauty of the system of Hong Kong cinema."[24](*Genius*) The beauty of the system of Hong Kong cinema lies in the fact that it provided a viable platform outside of Hollywood and national cinema paradigms for economic survival and relative cultural autonomy. Instead of judging Hong Kong cinema for what it was not and what the system could not do, Hong Kong cinema ought to be appreciated for what it was (and is) and what the system can and did accomplish. Hong Kong cinema was not a national, non-commercial, or global popular cinema. The system could not sustain integrated studios for long, could not stay dominant in the region, or expand in a scale like Hollywood. But Hong Kong cinema was local, commercial and transnational. The system sustained a productive industry in a harsh environment for almost a century; it allowed for the coexistence of art films and mass entertainment and provided an outlet for collective cultural expression of dimensions not covered by Hollywood or Chinese cinema; it did allow for auteur directors to exercise their personal vision, making them a presence even as Hollywood dominated the region. The case of Hong Kong cinema illustrates how a small industry, by adapting to its habitat

and balancing various historical forces, survived and thrived in the world even without the material power of Hollywood or the state protection of national cinema. Hong Kong cinema in the 20th century was a cinema without a nation and a local cinema with transnational appeal that changed itself over time. Hong Kong cinema defies the recognized categories. How, then, should we theorize about it?

Since theory is generated to solve problems that have arisen in specific historical-cultural setting, theories from the West are not completely applicable to Hong Kong cinema. Yet since Hong Kong is a colonized, urbanized and westernized city, we should not completely discard Western theories either. Hong Kong cinema presents a theoretical conundrum because existing theories do not have a readymade framework to register Hong Kong cinema; their approaches are compartmentalized. This chapter looks at the duckling's reflection - finding its own beauty. It discusses the theoretical issues, and examines theories' assumptions, strength and weakness. We can then adjust our critical attitude and theoretical tools to better understand this local culture industry in a dependent territory. I would propose a circuit model that shows continuity and connectivity to illustrate the dynamism of the system of Hong Kong cinema. I will take multiple perspectives and borrow theoretical explanations from the fields of cultural studies, global media studies, East Asian studies, Hollywood studio system studies, and film festival research.

CULTURAL STUDIES

Culturalists look for explanations of the global presence of Hollywood in reception and text. They contest the claim of invincibility of structural forces and challenge the hypodermic needle model of media impact on people. Henry Jenkins III proposes a textual poacher theory to illustrate how proactive audience can be. The poachers appropriate the mainstream's text and reproduce it for their own pleasure. These

poachers are proactive consumers, crossing over from reception to production. However, their production is confined by what is made available at the consumption, and their sporadic effort cannot sustain a systematic resistance. When extending this argument to transnational textual poaching, the making of a local version of Hollywood hit only proves that local audience is active. But this does not lead to the assertion that local producers are also active. In a secondhand culture, one can make do with the others' cultural surplus without extricating oneself from a marginal position. Textual poaching alone doesn't rectify power inequity; one cannot claim cultural autonomy if the local filmmaking community cannot originate production and sustain that production system. Nevertheless, in the case of Hong Kong cinema transnational textual poaching can be regarded as a learning process prior to the point at which local industry came up with its own original action aesthetic and the theme of doubleness (double undercover and double faces) that Hollywood then borrowed back.

Scott Robert Olson's narrative transparency theory attributes Hollywood's global presence to the country's unique cultural characteristic, a diversified population. [25] He reasons that media products catered for American domestic audience can also meet the need of the diversified foreign audience. Olson's multi-culturalism theory does not apply to Hong Kong cinema since Hong Kong, with 95% of its population being Chinese and 98% speaking Cantonese, is much less racially and linguistically diversified than neighboring countries and yet its cinema was the most exportable in the region during the 1990s. That said, like Hollywood, Hong Kong cinema also benefited from its hometown's hybrid culture. As a Chinese society under British rule, Hong Kong was at the junction of two major network civilizations, inheriting the cultural legacies of the British and Chinese Empires. The British Empire ruled one fourth of the world's population at its peak. The "Anglo-sphere" contains the world's most affluent and dominant countries,

and English is the most dominant language in the world. Chinese, living in China proper and overseas, account for more than one fourth of the world's population. Neighboring countries in Asia, heavily influenced by Chinese civilization in areas ranging from philosophy to language to the use of chopsticks, constitute a large "Chopstick Culture" bloc. The confluence of these British and Chinese civilizations in Hong Kong facilitated its cinema's accessibility to a large portion of the world's population familiar with the narratives from both civilizations. Since there is a structural factor for cultural leverages of Hong Kong cinema, cultural factors should not be split from structural factors when explaining Hong Kong cinema's exportability.

GLOBAL MEDIA AND REGIONAL STUDIES

Marxist theorists attribute Hollywood's world dominance to structural factors. Cultural imperialism theory claims that there is economic domination and cultural homogenization by the dominant power over the rest of the world (Schiller). It is criticized for overgeneralization and material-determinism for assuming that the "hardware" - material power - is necessary and sufficient to explain the U.S. media's many years of dominance. By assuming Hollywood is monolithic, the theory overlooks the interdependence between Hollywood distribution and non-Hollywood fare, as well as how such relationships allowed Hong Kong cinema to crack into the dominant system. It infers subjective cultural experience from objective structural factors, assuming passive local audiences are completely at the mercy of global media. On the surface this theory does not seem to apply to Hong Kong cinema: it neither had the material power of the U.S. nor was it dominated by Hollywood. However, as will be detailed in the next chapter, Hong Kong lies at the junction of two major historical networks of commerce: the tribute system of the Chinese Celestial Empire and the international trading system of the British Empire. Takeshi Hamashita points out that Hong Kong was located at the

entrance of the tribute system in East and Southeast Asia for the Chinese Empire, and as a trading port of the British Empire the city was pushed toward integration in the world capitalist system very early on. Economically, Hong Kong cinema was privileged by the structural conditions of global capitalism. Culturally, it enjoyed structural factor for its cultural leverage at the junction of two major network civilizations. Hong Kong cinema occupied a privileged position in the world's asymmetrical power structure.

Joseph Straubhaar, framing the imperialism issue in a more complex way acknowledging the issue of asymmetrical interdependence, proposes a cultural proximity theory that explores the local direction. He proofs local audience preference for local production and infers that audiences actively seek out cultural proximity in cultural goods. This native-culture-as-resistance argument is the opposite of Western-centrism -- nativist centrism. Hong Kong's native culture, known for its transnational character, has never been unmixed. And, given the extensive scope of co-productions in Hong Kong it is hard to work out an operative definition of local production to implement Straubhaar's assumption of a clear distinction between local and foreign productions. The colonized culture's agency for self-writing is a kind of empowerment. I would propose to remodel this theory by shifting the focus from local audiences to local producers. As we shall see in the case studies, Hong Kong filmmakers actively search for cultural proximity in their productions. Their films told a distinctive local story and exhibit strong Hong Kong cultural sensibility despite being export-oriented, catering to foreign tastes.

Globalization, conventionally defined as compression of the world and as the opposite of localization, is often understood in binary terms. Roland Robertson in his glocalization theory argues against this binary conception and the cultural homogenization thesis by illustrating the tempering effects of local conditions on global pressure. He emphasizes the simultaneity of homogenization and heterogenization and

the interpenetration of global and local. Sinclair and Wilken illustrate how American-based international conglomerates adopt "strategic regionalization" in Asia as "a kind of practical compromise with an extreme nation-by-nation approach – that is, a means of ensuring that marketing campaigns are not glocalized any more than is strictly necessary" (147). International conglomerates lean towards global standardization to take advantage of their economy of scale. Robertson says the whole question of what will 'fly' globally is in part contingent upon issues of power, but that it is not simply a matter of Western modernity's hegemonic extension. But because Robertson's theory does not address the politics of difference it falls short when this strategy of local adaptation of the global is adopted in reverse. It cannot explain why East Asia-based producers lean toward local differentiation, in contrast to international conglomerates' global standardization. Without dealing with historical specificity of Western imperialism in East Asia, Robertson's glocalization theory cannot explain why only certain places in the East such as Japan and Hong Kong are in a privileged position to export cultural products to the West. It cannot explain why Japan has to mask its Japaneseness in media products like *Mario Brothers and Sailor Moon* (as we shall see later in a Japanese scholar's argument) while Hong Kong cinema foregrounded its Chineseness in its kung fu films. The Western global players set the parameter and pick local participants to join them. The assertion of the local is made within the global terms of identity and particularity. Without taking history into consideration, glocalization, the practical compromise of the global-local binaries, does not repudiate Western centrism. As a theory it is too general to specify which nation or city is privileged to participate in the global game.

Michael Curtin, in his media capital theory, specifies the characteristics of places that emerge as centers of media production. In replacing nation-state with the city as the basic unit of analysis, he proposes an innovative concept: city cinema. He theorizes

factors that enable particular cities to emerge as centers of media activity in the global era. In particular, he points to "logics of accumulation, trajectories of creative migration, and forces of socio-cultural variation as a set of dynamic influences that interact at particular locations under specific historical conditions" (*Playing* 10). However, Curtin's case study on Hong Kong cinema overlooks Hong Kong's status as a dependent territory. In my view this factor alone—in the form of its potential as a threat to sovereign authority—can fatally harm the city's chances of becoming a global media capital. Media capital theory, by not going beyond a four level media agglomeration hierarchy model and only describing what the world is like without imagining what it can be, is not empowering for a genetically doomed city like Hong Kong which was and will always be a sub-sovereign territory. Keeping the film industry alive and getting to the second tier already exceeds the reasonable expectations for the city. Perhaps instead of viewing the media agglomeration hierarchy structure as everlasting and unchanging, we can situate it historically. We can imagine, for example, a proliferation of models like Hong Kong cinema eating away at Hollywood's overseas market and thus force it to respond. Curtin's theory of city cinema needs to be adjusted to deal with Hong Kong's peculiar colonial discourse and the complicit role of cities in the imperialist system. This location theory overlooks politics in East Asia, which provided the key source of financing and target market of Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s.

EAST ASIAN STUDIES

With the four former colonies that are the Asian Tigers achieving phenomenal economic growth, East Asia seems like an anomaly in dependency theory. Imperialist and nationalist policies in this region are characterized by discourse of economic development and soft authoritarian rule justified in the name of nationalism and development. Tani E. Barlow in the introduction to Formations of Colonial Modernity in

East Asia calls the analytical framework for neo-colonialism in East Asia "colonial modernity," which is a combination of political economy approach and discourse analysis.[26] Barlow's anthology is about persistence of colonial discourses and how colonial formations continue to shape the present in East Asia. Hong Kong is an excellent example to illustrate this neo-colonialism in East Asia; it is literally a colony with the economic achievement of a modern city. Hong Kong transnational commercial cinema was possible thanks to the material base laid by colonization and the appealing image of a modern city that capitalized on its peculiar colonial discourse. Commercial cinema relies on star and genre, embodiments of the society's ideological formation. To export stars and genres, that particular city needs to have a desirable, albeit mythologized, image in the world.

Paul du Gay et al.'s Doing Cultural Studies – The Story of the Sony Walkman, inadvertently show the inadequacy of glocalization theory to explain why a nation like Japan is privileged to export cultural products to the West. As pointed out by Koichi Iwabuchi (see below), they incidentally reinforces the West's stereotype of a depoliticized and hi-tech modern Japan. Their original intention is to use Sony Walkman as to the basis of an argument against the structural determinism thesis found in cultural imperialism theory. Their choice of a Japanese brand as case-in-point requires close examination. With most of the global conglomerates based in the West, they specifically pick an Asian firm and have to spend an entire chapter in asserting this firm as a global enterprise. They are in fact not arguing against the cultural imperialism from the West but the reverse version of it, i.e. the cultural imperialism from the East, the threat of Japan-based global firm homogenizing other cultures. According to their analysis, Sony could export the Walkman globally because it adopted the strategy of glocalization. Their understanding of Japanese glocalization is an apolitical business calculation: to be more

cost effective it responds directly to local conditions, is sensitive to local cultural differences and decentralizes its management to give a higher degree of local autonomy. They overlook the regional history of Asia, political issues in Asian market, a global asymmetrical power structure and Japan's privileged position in it. They may have proven that Western domination is not complete, but they do not show that Sony's success refutes Western centricism. Sony's marketing strategy supports and capitalizes on Western modernity rather than challenging it. As we shall see below Koichi Iwabuchi states that du Gay et al. overlook the fact that Japanese producers have adeptly factored in their marketing strategy to defuse the appearance of a "Japanese threat" – the West's fear of the alleged danger of the yellow race and neighboring countries' memories of Japan's militaristic past – by removing anything that might associate the Japanese media product with the country or people of Japan. du Gay et al., skipping over Japan's history and colonialist discourse in their case study, proceed to argue for the significance of culture's role in global business. Their "cultural study" overlooks Japan's privileged position in the world's asymmetrical power structure which facilitates the discursive power advantage of Japanese cultural producers.

Koichi Iwabuchi, adopting a discourse analysis approach to study Japanese cultural presence overseas during the 1990s, unearths the political discourse behind the marketing strategy of Japanese media products in "Marketing 'Japan': Japanese cultural presence under a global gaze." He summarizes the Orientalist's image of Japan and points out how du Gay et al.'s interpretation of the Sony Walkman's Japaneseness gets caught in the Orientalist's stereotypical image of modern Japan. He writes, "the dominant image of 'Japan' constructed by a Western Orientalist discourse and reinforced by a self-Orientalising discourse in Japan, is mainly concerned with 'traditional' and particularistic cultures and, more recently, hi-tech sophistication…The Sony Walkman, they (du Gay et

al.) argue, may signify 'Japanese-ness' in terms of miniaturisation, technical sophistication and high quality" (167). He disagrees with their view and proposes a cultural odor theory to explain why Japanese media products are so exportable. He attributes the global appeal of a certain product not to the product itself but the image of the product's country of origin. He argues that it is the discursive formation of the country that confers the product symbolic meaning. He writes, "The way in which the cultural odour of a particular product becomes 'fragrance' – a socially acceptable, desirable smell – is not determined simply by the perception of the consumer that something is 'made in Japan'. Neither is it necessarily related to the functions, influences or the quality of a particular product or image. It has more to do with discursively constructed images of the country of origin, which are widely disseminated in the world." By "cultural odor" he refers to "cultural presence of a country of origin and images or ideas of its way of life are positively associated with a particular product in the consumption process" (166). In this 1998 article he quotes McDonald's as an example and claims that its international success is associated with an attractive image of American way of life. In contrast to du Gay's apolitical reading, he analyzes how Japanese producers defuse the "Japanese threat" symbolized in their products. He claims that the audio-visual products Japan exports overseas are "culturally odorless", a term he defines as "someone or something lacking any nationality, but [which] also implies the erasure of racial or ethnic characteristics and any context that would embed the characters in a particular culture or country." (167). However, what he claims as "culturally odorless" is actually only deodorized of Japanese-ness and replaced by "Western fragrance," as seen in the examples he cites as internationally exportable Japanese products. For example, acclaimed Japanese animation characters modeled on Caucasian types: the name and appearance of characters of a computer game Mario Brothers are

Italian; The name of a global company (Sony) and its product (Walkman) are in English. He quotes a Japanese cultural producer's claim and writes, Japan is "the most successfully Westernised country in the world" (172). Iwabuchi agrees with Japanese producers' assumption that being Westernized is modern and a success in itself. Iwabuchi celebrates Japanese originality in developing glocalization and he asserts that Japanese cultural industries' role is to become interpreters of the West for Asia, "selling the know-how of indigenizing the West" (165). So, from his description it seems that Japanese cultural industries are not rejecting or critical of Western-centricism; rather, they capitalize on it. Iwabuchi suggests that one of the reasons for the lack of strong impetus on the part of Japanese cultural industries to export popular culture is the "historical obstacle of the memory of Japanese colonialism in exporting Japanese culture to other parts of Asia." However, later he states that "Cultural prestige, Western cultural hegemony, the universalism of the United States and the prevalence of the English language are advantageous to Hollywood" (169). Iwabuchi's assumption is: Western-based international conglomerates, unlike Japanese cultural industries, do not have the historical obstacle of the memory of Western colonialism in exporting their culture to Asia. Therefore what is actually narrated in Japanese cultural products is its (Western) modernity while the colonial issue (embedded in racial characteristic) is displaced.

Modern Japanese cultural producers' practice of adopting white Western characters can be traced back to Imperial Japan's colonial discourse. Leo Ching, paraphrasing Frantz Fanon in the title of his article "Yellow skin, white masks – race, class, and identification in Japanese colonial discourse", points out the peculiarity of Japanese colonial discourse. He writes "Japan as the sole non-Western colonial power whose imperial dominions and colonial possessions are populated with peoples not utterly different from themselves in racial make-up and cultural inventions…The

proximity – in both geographical and cultural terms – of Japan to its empire required the Japanese to create rather different sets of what Edward Said has called the 'strategy of positional superiority'"[27] Imperial Japan's solution was to position and imagine itself racially in relation to both the 'white' imperialist and its 'yellow' colonial subject by inventing a unique Japanese race, an "honorary whites" which was an identification with the "white" race and a differentiation and dissociation from its Asian neighbors. As Ching indicates, Japanese writers in the imperialist era like Taguchi Ukichi claimed that Japanese belonged to the white race. He describes that Taguchi acknowledged that category "yellow race does exist, it's just that the Japanese did not belong to it!" ("Yellow Skin" 72) He points out the complicity of imperial Japan's racial discourse such as the one propagated by Taguchi which "does not refute the theoretical underpinnings of Western racialist discourse; his interest lies only in extricating and thereby elevating Japan from one racial category to another. Taguchi's rebuttal of racialist classification is not a rejection, but a revaluation and celebration thereof" ("Yellow Skin" 75). In Becoming "Japanese": Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation Ching continues to point out the complicity of Japan's imperialist discourse in which Japan narrated a history of modernization while evading the colonial question. Imperial Japan did not rebut the western imperialist ideological paradigm but instead supported white superiority and Western modernity. Japan's rising to power in the 19th century demonstrates that imperialism was not exclusively Western. While calling for solidarity of Asia against Western imperialism, Japan internalized the modern project in the form of Western imperialism and imposed its metropolitan industrialization and culture on its colonized subjects to assert its superior position. Japan rose up quickly, but was demilitarized after World War II. Its empire instantaneously disappeared and the spread of its culture is not comparable to that of Britain. However, as Leo Ching analyzes, with

the Allies' arrangement of the colonies after the war, Japan evaded the colonial issue. He writes, "the Japanese themselves subsequently avoided the agonizing procedures of decolonization, both politically, and culturally. Japan is thus able to narrate a history of transitions from defeat to demilitarization, recovery to economic miracle, that circumvents the colonial question" (*Becoming Japanese* 12). With various facilitations, collusion and the U.S.'s Cold War policy in the Pacific, Japan rose to become an economic superpower in Asia. It has in common with Western imperialist countries its modernization projects and its imperialist legacy. It is a privileged player in Asia and the only Asian country with a global media firm standing alongside with that of Western countries.

With the Japanese producers consciously suppressing Japaneseness and appropriate the "universal" whiteness and western-ness in their cultural products, Japanese strategy of glocalization takes into consideration of the historical factors of Japan (what Iwabuchi calls the cultural interpreter) and the West (what Iwabuchi calls the cultural origin for indigenization). Japanese cultural producers are not simply being sensitive to local cultural differences, but have adeptly worked around political and historical issues in their marketing strategies. There is a close and intricate relationship between a country's narrated history and its cultural producers' marketing strategy. If U.S. consumer goods seek to sell as representatives of a constructed American way of life, then Japanese glocalization, in fact, is also about exploiting Japan's cultural myth – the most modernized Asian country alongside the modernized West. Japanese cultural producers play to Japan's close ties with Western modernity in its hi-tech cultural image, but erase their race and evade the colonial issue. Du Gay et al's study of the cultural dimension of globalization does not acknowledge these historical and political issues. The persistence of the world's asymmetrical power structure is sustained by both material

and discursive power. Iwabuchi attempts to challenge the West-Rest paradigm but paradoxically verifies the persistence of Western centricism by showing how Japanese cultural producers' appropriate and reinforce Western centricism and insert Japan between the West and the Rest. The case of Sony complicates the dichotomous West-Rest model but does not question the hierarchal structure. Japan only moves itself up along the linear and singular conception of Western modernity. These studies of Japan-based global firms demonstrate how Japanese cultural producers, capitalize on Japan's cultural myth, wedge their way into the world's system by appropriating Whiteness and Western-ness. Given Japan's peculiar colonial discourse - Japan identifies with the White and proud of being Westernized - Iwabuchi's theory of cultural odor, replacing Japaneseness with Western cultural prestige, is unique for Japan and may not be applicable to most Asian countries.

Interestingly, the history of Hong Kong is also narrated as a victory story even though Hong Kong was on the receiving end of colonization. Imperial Japan, with its absurd racial discourse and peculiar justification for colonization of Asia, is demilitarized after the war. Modern Japan, continues to insert itself between Asia and the West, posts itself as a transparent interpreter of the West for Asia. According to Iwabuchi, in media products it is presented as a defanged modern nation with an economic superpower status in the region, adapting to the global without losing its essence. What is consistent with the colonial discourses between Imperial Japan and Modern Japan is their white- and Western-centrism. In the 1990s, Colonial Hong Kong and Modern Hong Kong were rolled into one and also claimed to adapt to the global without losing its essence. This miraculously accomplished the Chinese intellectuals' century-long goal of "Chinese learning for essential principles and Western learning for practical application" as well as avoiding invoking unpleasant white guilt for subjecting people to colonization in the

enlightened postmodern age. Situated between China and the West, Colonial Hong Kong occupied the interstitial space between Chinese nationalism and British colonialism. But Modern Hong Kong, despite the pressures of unbridled global capitalism, was perceived as a postmodern hybrid wonderland. The colonial discourse of Hong Kong is much more intriguing, complicit and harder to refute, especially when there was economic prosperity with a vibrant local popular culture. In contrast to Imperial Japan's military atrocities, economic exploitation and cultural assimilation policy, as well as its devastation of former colonies in the Third World, it seems that Britain was not a hideous colonizer and Hong Kong didn't suffer as its colony. Hong Kong, annexed by the British as an international trade port, also has close ties with Western modernity. While Japan's history is narrated as transitions from defeat to economic miracle and evades the colonial issue, the discursively constructed image of Hong Kong as a fishing village transformed to a modern city, is also presented as an economic miracle but colonization was endorsed instead of evaded. The British colonial governmental features were maintained after the sovereignty change, and justified in the name of keeping Hong Kong's "stability and prosperity". The modern Hong Kong success story was not sold to the West in the form of high technology or white animation characters. As we shall see in the next chapter it was sold as the myth of "Hong Kong Wonder": a genius efficient "Hong Kong system" with an apolitical free market economy, the official rhetoric of "positive non-interventionism", and the peculiar colonial democracy made up of consultative committees and politically apathetic economic men.

British colonization of Hong Kong was perceived as so innocuous that Hong Kong's success story was bought back by the West. The discursively constructed image of Hong Kong as a modern liberal city may explain why Western media scholars overlook the colonial government's highhanded policies concerning the Hong Kong film

industry. Despite the fact that the university is a key institution of modernity, there is the problem of the dearth of academic critical studies on Chinese language media. There is call for the de-Westernization of media studies, but attention to the issue of dependence by local scholarship on Western scholarship, and the production of knowledge based on Western epistemological schema and theories in and on Asia is far from adequate. The discourse of an apolitical efficient Hong Kong system and the essential quality of Hong Kong's politically apathetic economic men were reinforced by the academy. Sociologists Ambrose King and S. K. Lau are the best known representatives of this school. King's idea of the "administrative absorption of politics" refers to the process of the local Chinese elite being coopted to participate in colonial governance. Lau's idea of "utilitarian familism" and "social accommodation of politics" explains Hong Kong's political stability and low social mobilization. Both are concerned with modernization and the study of how the Hong Kong colonial system worked so well. These works, which were published in the 1980s are criticized by present-day scholars.

Law Kam-yee and Lee Kim-ming in the introduction of their anthology The Economy of Hong Kong in Non-economic Perspectives argue against the assumption of "pure economics": in mainstream media and mainstream economic explanations Hong Kong's economic achievement was often attributed to the success of the free market, the government's positive non-interventionism, the city-state's laissez faire policy, export-led development strategy, and Hong Kong entrepreneurs' flexibility in adapting to world economic changes, etc. Law and Lee assert that the economic system of Hong Kong is socially situated, and culturally, structurally and politically embedded. In their anthology with over forty articles from various disciplines, social scientists present a variety of factors to explain Hong Kong's economic advances, such as the unique Chinese culture in Hong Kong, the capital network of the enterprises, and Hong Kong's unique

geopolitics, etc. More importantly, they also explore the impact of ideology on economic growth, and especially the backing of the political system behind Hong Kong's economic development. Fred Y. L. Chiu points out the bizarre erasure of the social and politics of Hong Kong by academia. He describes how Hong Kong people were depicted in academic research as "willfully apolitical…desired a paternalistic and patriarchal government that would allow them to pursue their economic interest." He summarizes how academia in colonial Hong Kong paints a surreal picture of the city, "political scientists strive to do away with politics, while sociologists deny the very existence of the social. At the same time, economists substitute 'management' for economies in a system called 'positive non-interventionism'! What the members of each discipline fabricate are waves of neologistic labeling which are then used to frame Hong Kong as a mythical 'equilibrium' of developmental managerial laissez-faire-ism. This 'equilibrium' is said to coexist with popular consent devoid of 'social mobilization'" (295-96). While Chiu deconstructs the myth of apolitical economic men, Law Wing-sang in Re-theorizing Colonial Power shows the absurdity of Chinese nationalist discourse accommodating its polar opposite – colonialism (*Re-Theorizing*). He points out the hidden unequal power issue and the double allegiance of local elites. He attributes the popularity of the double allegiance theme in Hong Kong movies to the "political unconscious" in Hong Kong culture. He calls the bi-lingual bi-cultural Chinese elite joining the British-Chinese co-governing synarchy in early colonial years "collaborative colonialism". In another article, he coins the discourse around the sovereignty change "managerializing colonialism." While people in Hong Kong experience identity crisis, British and Chinese governments never had any confusion over the role Hong Kong should play. Hong Kong was annexed by the British as its Far East outpost, a trade port, a commercial city. In China's ideological imperative governing the construction of Hong Kong, the city, as a gateway

to modernity via colonialism, was of use to China's quest for modernity. Law describes the sovereignty change as characterized by ambiguously re-doubled colonization. The Chinese government both hated and loved the colonial legacies. Law summarizes how managerialism is employed to normalize the absurdity: "managerialism, as the ideology of the experts in governance, has to be mediating between colonialism and nationalism as a pair of twin discourses" ("Managerializing" 120). The job of the local elite now is to teach the Chinese government how to manage Hong Kong efficiently.

What is intriguing about Hong Kong's colonization is not only its double allegiance and double colonization, but also its double positioning. Law Wing-sang points out that during the sovereignty change the discourse was mediated by a set of managerial discursive processes feeding on the urban-rural imaginary schema (*Re-Theorizing*). He calls attention to the complicity of the city in the imperialist plan. He writes, colonial city, constructed and modeled after Western cities and situated at the top of the hierarchy of imperialist exploitation, serves as the nerve center to exploit the resources of neighboring rural areas. Mirana May Szeto's "Petit-grandiose Hong Kongism" draws attention to the double positioning of Hong Kong in relation to China in the mainstream cultural imaginary with its implication of the binary "urban Hong Kong vs. rural China" . It is to this cultural sensibility of complicity and the double positioning of Hong Kong that other privileged cities in East Asia can relate.

Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s was at once resistant and acquiescent to Western supremacy and adopted a cultural strategy that was complicit and self-conflicting. As we shall see in the following discussion, the genre and stars of Hong Kong cinema are the embodiment of the issues of colonial modernity in East Asia. If Japan's cultural myth is posting itself as the most modernized Asian country alongside the modernized West, Hong Kong's cultural myth is imagining itself as the most modernized Chinese city

alongside the modernized West. It is in mainstream movies that Hong Kong is presented as a Chinese cosmopolitan nexus, and the inherent conflict between nationalism and cosmopolitanism is magically resolved. And, also magically, unbridled global capitalism can be miraculously kept in check by the traditional Chinese moral code. Hong Kong cinema was enabled by both structural advantages and discursive advantages under British colonization. Therefore we need to integrate the political economy approach with the cultural studies approach to understand the system of Hong Kong cinema.

STUDIES ON HOLLYWOOD AND NATIONAL CINEMA

Scholars of the Hollywood studio system adopt an integrative approach that connects structure with text and focuses on the industry's modus operandi. I categorize the studies on Hollywood and national cinemas into four approaches: the Marxist approach, institutional approach, ritual approach and authorship approach. Studies by Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, and Thomas Schatz (*Genius;* "New Hollywood"; "Return") illustrate the self-regenerating mechanism of the Hollywood studio system. They attribute Hollywood's strength to its powerful "software" – the studio system.

Marxist approach

In The Classical Hollywood Cinema Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985) adopt a Marxist approach and demonstrate that in a capitalist system the mode of production influences film style. However, their understanding of the base structure is confined to the mode of production. They overlook other material structures, such as mode of exhibition or source of financing, which can also influence film style. In examining the aesthetic and economic forces involved in the development of classical Hollywood cinema, they overlook the national specificity of Hollywood. They study the production, distribution and exhibition sectors, but have left out the financial sector. They

miss the fact that Hollywood is situated in a country with the strongest banking sector in the world, which affords a steady cash flow for the smooth running of the Hollywood studio system.

Institutional approach

The institutional approach regards institutions as the "rules of the game", which consist of both the formal legal rules and the informal social norms that govern individual behavior and structure social interactions. Thomas Schatz proposes an equilibrium theory and illustrates how the studio as a site of convergence balances various historical forces. He exalts Hollywood's autonomous system as "genius". He states that the classical Hollywood between 1920s and 1960 is

> "…a period when various social, industrial, technological, economic, and aesthetic forces struck a delicate balance. That balance was conflicted and ever shifting but stable enough through four decades to provide a consistent system of production and consumption, a set of formalized creative practices and constraints, and thus a body of work with a uniform style – a standard way of telling stories, from camera work and cutting to plot structure and thematic. It was the studio system at large that held those various forces in equilibrium." (*Genius* 8-9)

Schatz's study is historically specific but he also left out the financial sector. Both Bordwell et al and Schatz believe in the resilience of the Hollywood studio system i.e. the individual players may change, but the studio system and oligarchy market structure persist. In history to date Hollywood is the only global cinema with no peer in terms of power and scale. It is easy to err in believing that the Hollywood studio system is the only proven system of the global cinema, and slip into a belief in an eternal studio system. However, these American scholars' studies of American commercial cinema in a world capitalist system of international trade overlook the vital role of the American financial sector, to which the American film industry has been tightly tethered since the early years. This is a significant lacuna since the American film industry is a transnational

business, and financing plays a pivotal role in the world's postmodern economy (Harvey). At the macro level, they overlook the tie between Hollywood, American financial institutions and Washington. At the micro level, they didn't pay attention to modes of financing. Bordwell et al. illustrate how the mode of production influences film style, but they didn't study how the mode of financing influences filmmaking practice and film style.

American scholars Bordwell et al. and Schatz's oversight is filled by David Puttnam. Puttnam in Movies and Money traces the history of the close ties between American working class banks and the Hollywood majors, which also started their business for working class immigrants. Janet Wasko's Movies and Money – Financing the American Film Industry is a critical study on Hollywood film financing (*Movies and Money*). Wasko traces Hollywood's close ties with the American financial sector which is strictly regulated and influenced by Washington. She insightfully points out Hollywood's political tie: the banks' control over the studios at a high level is established by setting parameters for the film industry rather than by monitoring the day-to-day operations. Hollywood's expansion was backed by American financial institutions, which in the 1970s already owned 70% of the world's debt and still is the most powerful sector in the world economy. With such a backing, the Hollywood majors can afford to take much greater financial risks than any film company or national cinema in the world. This is confirmed from the website of Motion Picture of America (MPAA), "Moviemaking is an inherently risky business… No other nation in the world risks such immense capital to make, finance, produce and market their films." (Z. Shan) (Z. Shan) (Z. Shan) (Z. Shan) (Z. Shan) (Z. Shan) [28] (qtd. in *How Hollywood Works* 3). However, Wasko's study, assuming a vertical relationship between financing and film production, implies no room for power negotiations between the two. As we shall see in the next two chapters, Hong

Kong cinema, having alternative sources and modes of financing, was able to engage in a more flexible relationship with Hollywood without being subjected to be either its dependent or its nemesis. And it also got around the colonial government's indirect control via the banking sector, which was dominated by British banks. And, without the requirements of a script and proper procedures, this more cash-based flexible mode of financing allowed Hong Kong filmmakers to enjoy the freedom of freestyle filmmaking.

Bordwell et al.'s studies of Hollywood in the classical era assume that commercial first-run theater distribution was the only bottleneck, the key sector for market control. Schatz's study on "New Hollywood" describing how the majors retained their roles as financiers and distributors in the 1970s, and acknowledges the important role of film distribution ("New Hollywood"). In the U.S. in the 1990s, commercial independent production has a symbiotic (dependent) relationship with the Hollywood majors (Perren). Video, cable, network television, merchandizing and the like are derivative markets of Hollywood conglomerates (Schatz "Return"). Schatz and Bordwell et al.'s studies in the 1980s did not foresee the rise of new technology and alternative distribution and exhibition channels, which decentralize the markets. They focus on the U.S.'s domestic market and neglect the international arena where Hollywood's traditional strategy of centralized market control was rendered less effective by the rise of new technology and intensified globalization in the 1990s. Outside the U.S. there are emerging alternative international distribution systems that are not dependent on Hollywood, such as the piracy industry and international film festival circuit. Hollywood's windowing practice sections the derivative markets, based on centralized control and the linear concept of time. The piracy industry, enabled by digital technology, disrupts this practice, circumvents Hollywood majors' control and eats away their overseas markets. The international film festival, as Julian Stringer studying the

relationship between Hollywood and the globalized film festival circuit points out, is an alternative distribution network. The international film festivals offer "the rest of the world a chance, exhibiting and evaluating films produced outside the commercial U.S. 'mainstream'" (202). They provide platforms for local filmmakers to "breakthrough" internationally and open doors abroad, even though a major film festival like Cannes is also a "notoriously exploitative commercial film market" (204). Nevertheless, these two major distribution systems, operating in the same world capitalist system with Hollywood, are still related to Hollywood. The most pirated movies in the world market are Hollywood features. International film festivals signify an atmosphere of prestige, rarity, the highbrow and elitist, which qualities are meant to be alternative and reacting to Hollywood. These two rising global commercial distribution systems are understudied. Hong Kong cinema was heavily dependent on overseas markets and its distribution sector was the weakest compared to their counterpart in Hollywood.

The socio-cultural motive of film production was also insufficiently studied by these scholars. Bordwell et al.'s study make no reference to an American cultural context in that particular era or single out individual filmmakers. Schatz fills this lacuna by situating the studio system in a specific American historical context and takes into account the role of individual players. He describes meticulously the role of creative producers in the studio system in balancing the creative and business aspects of film producing. He affirms human agency by demonstrating how the producers and directors are able to engage in creative activities despite the constraints of the studio system. He describes the rise and fall of the movie moguls struggling in an emerging business in an immigrant society. However, while celebrating the individual's agency, Schatz does not examine the relationship between film producing and its cultural context. He pays no attention to the asymmetrical social power structure in American culture in that particular

era that privileged young males to be the creative producers. Susan Douglas, relating technological history to its social and cultural context, in Inventing American Broadcasting 1899-1922 describes, in the U.S. starting in the teens that there was the emergence of the boy hero image: the self-made stars who succeeded without relying on their fathers' largesse, in the popular culture which redefined American masculinity. This youth culture and the democratic myth in an immigrant society probably privileged certain individuals to rise to leadership in a new popular culture industry. Schatz's institutional study does not go further to analyze how social and cultural factors like gender, class and race influence the filmmaking practice, select leaders, shape organizational structures and the modes industry forms.

Schatz's oversight of the institution's being socio-culturally influenced is filled by Keith Negus. In The Production of Culture/Cultures of Production Negus argues that "the activities of staff working in the cultural industries are informed by particular sets of values, beliefs and working practice – a 'culture of production' … has a significant impact on the 'production of culture'" (69). He asserts that, "We need to study the culture of production not only within the organization, but also how these connect with broader social divisions and how these are given specific cultural meanings within the production process" (102). A study of the broader society and cultural practice can help us better understand why the studio system situated in American culture works in a particular way, and then why in a different socio-cultural context like Hong Kong, filmmakers devise a commercial system quite different from that of Hollywood. As we shall see in chapter 5 the case of women producers illustrates how the industry capitalized on the woman's traditional role as a multi-task caretaker and her modern role as an executive leader. There was a connection between the organizational structure of the film industry and the broader social divisions in Hong Kong society.

Schatz affirms the aesthetic and social value of commercial cinema by emphasizing the individual. As John Caldwell describes, Schatz "showed how the personalities of each of the studios in the classical era were written into the films produced at each company because of the controlling oversights of studio bosses" (198). Such an effort to redeem the individual author in a collaborative work can also be seen in Horace Newcomb and Robert Alley's The Producer's Medium: Conversations with Creators of American Television. Newcomb and Alley were aware of the socio-cultural context in which the television industry was situated. They mention the connection between the American TV industry and the broader social divisions of American society. In the introduction, they admit the reason for the omission of women and minority members in their book is "because the structure of the television industry, like the structure of American society, has been dominated by white males." With the intention to affirm television as an art form, Newcomb and Alley declare it their mission to "shatter the anonymity of television" and they do it also by emphasizing the individual - asserting television as a producer's medium. They argue that a self-conscious creative producer is an auteur with vision, mastery and discipline. In an implicit argument against the Marxist emphasis on the mode of production superseding the individual, they strike to the other extreme, the individual artist's sovereignty. They aimed to rescue the network officials from their relative obscurity, but they limit their object of rescue to producers. Below the line members remain neglected. Newcomb and Alley overlook the fact that they can claim television as a producer's medium because their auteur is situated in an institution with a pyramid-shaped hierarchical organizational structure. The producer at the apex of the organization is the center of power and creative control, maintaining both management consistency and narrative coherence. In an effort to affirm American commercial film and television industries' artistic value, Newcomb and Alley and

Schatz's works emphasize the producer's individuality, whereas individuality is an aesthetic value which emerged in Western fine art in the industrialized age. The producer system of American film and television industries worked within the particular context of American corporate culture with major corporations sharing the pyramid organization structure. The American media industry was situated in the particular U.S. political-economic context, i.e. a democracy but with its economy characterized by corporate domination. The producer in American media industry is a situated author in a situated institution.

Schatz, Newcomb and Alley's oversight of the political-economically situated American media institution is filled by Tino Balio in Grand Design – Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise 1930-1939. According to Balio's argument the industry revived after the Depression when the majors behaved like modern business enterprises. He quotes from Alfred D. Chandler Jr. who defined the modern business enterprise as having two specific characteristics: i) it contains many distinct operating units and is managed by a hierarchy of salaried executives; and ii) separation of management from ownership. The argument of Alfred D. Chandler, Jr.'s The Visible Hand – The Managerial Revolution in American Business is that the visible hand of management replaced the invisible hand of market forces. He states: "The market remained the generator of demand for goods and services, but modern business enterprise took over the functions of coordinating flows of goods through existing processes of production and distribution, and of allocating funds and personnel for future production and distribution. As modern business enterprise acquired functions hitherto carried out by the market, it became the most powerful institution in the American economy and its managers the most influential group of economic decision makers" (1). This is a producer market, a corporate dominant market economy. In Hong Kong it is hard to imagine that any

Chinese business in the 1910s could acquire those functions and be allowed to become the most powerful institution in Hong Kong economy, and a potential threat to its sovereign power. Situated in a different political economic context Chinese-capital institutions in Hong Kong developed a different organizational structure. Hong Kong started with a colonial economic system: the British hongs monopolized the major economic sectors such as banking and financing, aviation, communication and public utilities which usually had a corporate hierarchical structure. The Chinese businesses developed outside the government plan and British hongs' activities. The open port policy was adopted throughout British rule. In the 1990s, Hong Kong's economy, which remained small and open, was susceptible to speculative and international economic activities. Despite the rise of Chinese corporations, half of Hong Kong's business organizations were still Small and Medium scale Enterprises (SMEs)[29] with flexible organizational structures. The Hong Kong film industry with its horizontal organization structure was part of this SME culture, a contrast to the Hollywood pyramid organization structure within America's corporate culture.

Besides operating as a modern business enterprise, Hollywood is also an institution run on abstract factors like fantasy and glamour. In How Hollywood Works Janet Wasko briefly mentions that Hollywood "seems to have a fantasy quality, even non-production work in the film industry seems glamorous" (*How Hollywood Works* 47). She describes,"(T)here is a glut of eager workers for Hollywood companies to employ." The abundance of the labor supply is a great asset, but Wasko doesn't compute how such an intangible quality is translated into tangible capital. She doesn't define "fantasy quality" and "glamour" in cultural terms, i.e. the cultural meaning of such an economic activity like filmmaking in Hollywood to this particular community. Nevertheless, her idea is inspiring for developing a concept of "cinema branding". To borrow Iwabuchi's

notion of “cultural odor”, the discursively constructed image of the city as a Chinese cosmopolitan construct has conferred symbolic meaning to Hong Kong cinema as a liberal lively Chinese culture industry. This may be the appeal of the Hong Kong film industry to Chinese talents and filmmakers from various parts of the world. Hong Kong cinema was not associated with glamour and power like Hollywood is, but its image was distinctive, like a national cinema.

Tom O’Regan problematizes the concept of national cinema in Australian National Cinema, but he also points out the strategic role of government in sustaining domestic production and the national cinema’s role in creating a space for non-Hollywood filmmaking. Even though Hollywood is a global cinema, it is no exception to national cinema. The U.S. government also plays a strategic role in setting the parameters for the industry and steering its development despite the rhetoric of a free market economy. Michael Curtin points out the role of U.S. government in creating a market-driven system and calls its policy “official internationalism” in “Beyond the Vast Wasteland: the Policy Discourse of Global Television and the Politics of American Empire” analyzing the political context of the early 1960s “Vast Wasteland” speech ("Beyond"). He argues that the discourse was inextricably linked to the imperial aspirations of American foreign policy in a post-colonial world since it set the parameters for the adoption of the new satellite technology, and its policymakers were imagining an *international* community of the Free World. Curtin is insightful to foreground the covert state intervention in commercial enterprises in a democracy like the U.S. but his study of Hong Kong cinema overlooks the role of the colonial government in creating the commercial system and molding an apolitical entertainment industry. There was also the contradiction between stated governing policy and unstated film policy. On the one hand there was the colonial government’s official discourse of “positive non-intervention”. On

the other hand there was the British imperialist policy in East Asia ("Imperialism of Free Trade") enforcing a commercial system and the colonial policy of disciplining the film industry. We shall see in chapter 5 that Hong Kong cinema, having neither government facilitation nor the right to freedom of expression, was in fact on parole.

Ritual approach

The ritual approach explains the socio-cultural motive for the industry. In Hong Kong empires and regimes came and went: the Qing dynasty's demise; the British Empire diminished; the Japanese defeated; the KMT government retreated. But Hong Kong cinema survived for collective cultural expression. The ritual approach is adopted by studies in popular media, genre and stars. Hong Kong cinema has been popular since its early years and productions in the 1990s were mainly star- and genre-driven.

Back in the 1970s when television was generally dismissed as mindless entertainment in the academy, Newcomb argues that television is the most popular art form, affirming the aesthetic value of this mass entertainment. In "Television as a cultural forum" Newcomb and Hirsch, quoting James Carey's ritual view of communication, assert television's cultural function. They put forth a dynamic model in which both the producers and consumers are active and their relationship is interactive. They agree with Carey's view: "Communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" and propose that television text functions as a cultural forum in which important cultural topics may be considered (505). On the production side the producers use the mass media as a means for personal expression, and on the reception side the individual audience creates his or her own meaning from the text. This is an ideal democratic system in which the producers and the audience interact directly and have comparable power. However, Newcomb and Hirsch do not show how their theoretical model actually works and how the producers and audience interact.

Nevertheless, their ritual view of television as a cultural forum for a community to deal with common issues is useful for understanding Hong Kong cinema's cultural function in the region. Hong Kong, as a colony without the official title of Colony,[30] was not atypical amongst other limbo states in East Asia such as Taiwan (which claims to be independent but is under constant threat from China), Singapore (a city state), South Korea (partitioned during the Cold War) and Japan (demilitarized by the U.S.) which are also susceptible to external actors influencing the domestic authority structure. Hong Kong's identity crisis arising from the fear and hope over the sovereignty change was a cultural sensibility which Hollywood and national cinemas like Chinese cinema did not and could not represent. Hong Kong popular cinema served as a forum in the region to deal with our common concerns such as our colonial past, the Japanese military atrocities, the Cold War polarization of the region, the soft authoritarian governments, the pain in economic growth and the persistence of a political limbo status in the future.

Thomas Schatz, in Hollywood Genres, regards genre as a form of social ritual, a sort of tacit "contract" between filmmakers and audience, and movie production is a dynamic process of exchange between the film industry and its audience. He argues that many qualities traditionally viewed as artistic shortcomings "assume a significantly different value when examined as components of a genre's ritualistic narrative system" (*Hollywood Genres* 15). The cultural function of genre filmmaking is to project an idealized cultural self-image. Therefore commercial filmmaking is like a form of contemporary mythmaking, the process of a unique conceptual system that confronts and resolves immediate social and ideological conflicts. To Schatz, Hollywood film genres are formal strategies for renegotiating and reinforcing American ideology. Even though Hollywood is a global cinema, Schatz's conception of genre film is domestic market-oriented, as seen in his referring to filmmakers and audiences as fellow Americans. For

example, he writes, "A culture's mythology…represents its society speaking to itself." "They are among the various stories our culture tells itself." "Professional filmmakers are cut from the same cultural cloth as the members of the audience, of course, and we can assume that their response to human existence is substantially the same as the viewers" (*Hollywood Genres* 264). As Hong Kong cinema was heavily dependent on overseas markets, the assumption of the filmmakers and their audience being cut from the same cultural cloth cannot be made. Hong Kong genre film was not just Hong Kong society speaking to itself. As a contract between Hong Kong filmmakers and their audiences, it is an idealized cultural image of Hong Kong agreed upon by three partners: the domestic audience, the overseas audience and Hong Kong filmmakers. Schatz's genre approach needs to be adjusted for the transnational dimension when applied to Hong Kong cinema. In the 1990s Hong Kong produced only two major genres: action and comedy. In terms of film genre development, the 1990s stands out as a complex and distinctive era and the most overtly genre-driven production period in Hong Kong film history.[31] Anxiety permeated every genre with films revealing the peculiarity of Hong Kong's colonial discourse in which colonialism, nationalism, communism, capitalism, modernity and globalism acquired complicated meanings. Hong Kong film genres are formal strategies for renegotiating and reinforcing ideology about Hong Kong by domestic audiences, overseas audiences and Hong Kong filmmakers. In contrast to Japanese media showcasing high technology and the erasure of race, Hong Kong action film showed off stunning kung fu, foregrounding its low tech-ness and Chinese-ness. Never before in Hong Kong cinema was local identity and the export-oriented film industry so closely aligned via genre films.

Hong Kong film production has been star-driven since its inception. Richard Dyer, in Stars, argues how stars give expression to the collective unconscious. The

producers define and delimit the choice of stars and the audience elects which stars get to stay in the market. Both are shaped by the particular ideological formation of their situation in society. Existing star studies mostly interpret what each individual star means for the local audience. Star crossover studies are mostly confined to crossover within the same nation or language. In Hong Kong productions, having overseas appeal was a must for stars. Hong Kong's transnational stardom involves a crossover between nations, languages and races. Existing star study needs to be adjusted when applied to a transnational cinema. Currently, despite the rise of transnational cinemas, transnational stardom is seriously understudied and there is no study of stars' cultural meaning as a collective from a city or nation. To borrow Iwabuchi's idea of "cultural odor", it is the discursive formation of Hong Kong that confers Hong Kong stars' symbolic meanings. Japanese animation characters are modeled after Caucasians and Iwabuchi describes, "Japanese animation industries always have the global market in mind and are aware that the non-Japanese-ness of characters works to their advantage in the export market" (167). Hong Kong filmmakers have also always had the overseas market in mind. How does Hong Kong stars' Hong Kong-ness work to their advantage in the export market? And, what is Hong Kong-ness? There is no study on the relationship between the discursively constructed image of Hong Kong and the stars as a collective representing Hong Kong-ness. Given this huge limitation, transnational stardom is not covered in this project.

The ritual approach emphasizes the socio-cultural motive for the media industry. In the 1990s Hong Kong cinema, being the only non-standard sinitic-language cinema that could challenge the Mandarin-dominated cinema from China and elsewhere, contested the global and national denial of its local historical agency and spoke its local story to the world with a variety of voices from its individual directors.

Authorship approach

In the 1990s stars gave Hong Kong cinema recognizable faces in the world but it was directors who gave it distinctive voices. Classic auteur theory is challenged for being overly romantic about filmmakers transcending the studio system. Modernists announcing the death of the author, leave us with no individuated voice for expression. In the 1980s and 1990s there was a celebration of the auteur director cult status in the industry. In the new millennium there was the revival of the authorship approach in the academy. David A. Gerstner and Janet Staiger point out the usefulness of the authorship approach in studying the dynamic relationship between the individual and the system. They state, "…the individuals…function within the constraints and possibilities of the cultural fields and systems that inform the filmmaking conventions in which they operate. What is at stake, of course, is negotiating these systems through the [marking] of their identities in relationship to these conventions and method of filmmaking." By asserting that "(i)n naming an author, a function is served." Gerstner and Staiger points out the power of naming and how authorship can give agency to minority production by creating "the potential for expression, social change, and identification" (xii). Tom O'Regan argues that film, unlike broadcasting and print media, is international and cultural exchange is fundamental to cinema at every level ("Cultural Exchange"). Hong Kong cinema was always transnational but paradoxically, in the 1990s the more intensified the global competition was, the more personal and director-centric Hong Kong production was. The discussion of the global-local dynamic should go further to the personal level to better understand the global film business. No film can impact the audience without touching people at a personal level. The authorship approach reveals the individual filmmaker's tactics in surviving in the institution and thus can help shatter the anonymity of "minority production" like the Hong Kong cinema in the world.

The classic auteurism's over-romantic notion of transcending auteur-director and Schatz and Newcomb and Alley's oversight of the situated-ness of the auteur-producer in a hierarchical organization structure is filled by Timothy Corrigan's idea of "the commerce of auteurism" and John Caldwell's industrial auteur theory. Corrigan points out that the auteur in the revival of auteurism in the 1980s and 1990s was constructed by commerce and for commercial reasons. He proposes to re-contextualize the author within industrial and commercial trajectories. He states that an auteur is "a commercial strategy for organizing audience reception, as a critical concept bound to distribution and marketing aims that identify and address the potential cult status of an auteur" (103). Hong Kong cinema in 1990s is like a supermarket populated by typed directors who are differentiated not only by their films but also their public images. Each typed director has consciously found his position, branded himself and stayed in his type. Each has his trademark theme, trademark genre, long time collaborators and usual stars. They all had their personalities written into their films. Like producers of supermarket merchandise they all operated within Hong Kong cinema's commercial system and the colonial government's regulation. In Production Culture – Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television, John Caldwell proposes "theorizing from the ground up" and "industrial auteur theory." "Theorizing from the ground up", the opposite to the top-down authorship approaches, means critical theory embedded in the everyday experience of the workers. In the chapter on "Industrial auteur theory" Caldwell points out the tension between affirming collectivity and claiming autonomous responsibility as the central tenet of the production strategy in Hollywood. He describes how a television producer from an Ivy League background can suppress his elitist look and project a frat-boy image, flaunting Hollywood's mixing of high and low culture. Hong Kong film production was also characterized by collectivity given the practice of writing by

committee, no clear division of labor, and the troupe system that bonded the crew like a family. We shall see in the case studies the interesting tactics the director employed to project a distinctive image to mark his position in a supermarket mixing high and low culture, and yet benefitted by the team efforts in their productions. In the Hong Kong film industry horizontal organizational structure, power was much diffused. Hong Kong cinema could not be neatly defined as a director cinema or a producer cinema. So we need to adjust the authorship approach to take into consideration these factors and situate the director in various contexts. A project might start with a director's vision but it was the collaboration of the cast, crew and administrators that made a project work and the system function.

Film Festival Research

In the field of film festival study there is surge in scholarly interest in how the system works. Even though the film festival exists as an alternative distribution network and creates an atmosphere for the appreciation of film as art, it does not transcend the mundane issues of politics, power and money. Thomas Elsaesser in "Film festival network – the new topographies of cinema in Europe" points out that the international film festival is a very European institution that has globalized itself and has become the key force and power grid in the film business. But unlike Hollywood, it has the function of taste-making by canonizing masterpieces and consecrating auteurs. The auteur director, instead of the producer, is at the center of the system. For filmmakers the advantage of this system is "(i)t ensures visibility and a window of attention for films that can neither command the promotional budgets of Hollywood films nor rely on a sufficiently large internal market… to find its audience or recoup its investment." The film festival has salvaged the careers of certain Hong Kong art film directors. But, Elsaesser says the film festival circuit, as a global network face to face with Hollywood,

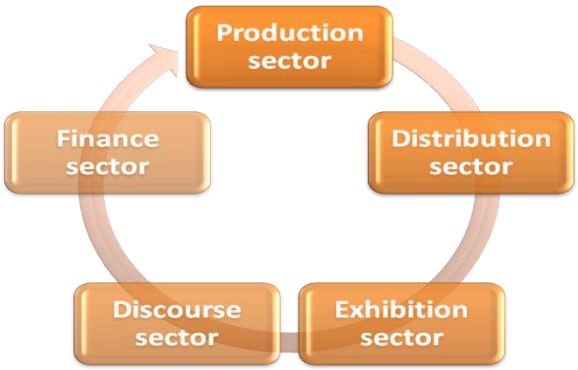
is also highly structured and has general rules governing the system. As a self-sustaining system for art films, it "first and foremost sets the terms for distribution, marketing and exhibition, yet to an increasing extent it regulates production as well, determined as this is in the non-Hollywood sector by the global outlets it can find, rather than by the single domestic market of its 'country of origin'"(88). While Elasesser delicately explains the complexity of film festival politicization, Mark Peranson lays bare the power struggle of the art film market in "First you get the power, then you get the money: two models of film festivals." He points out the false dichotomy of the multiplex and the film festival world as business versus art. But he presents 'core versus periphery' models of the film festival. The audience festival model, which describes the majority of the world's festivals with low budgets and little business presence is at the periphery. The business festival model such as Cannes, Berlin and Venice, which operate with both the market and a high budget, is at the core. In the business festival the distributor is the most important interest group and the sales agent, with the most powerful ones being French, is the defining actor. The sales agents and distributors decide what films will play where. Peranson points out that in this system, where a film plays is a question of power (or perceived power) as much as a question of money. The best way for festivals to attract the films they want is with cash, such as prize money for their competition. Peranson mentions how the system functions for powerful interest groups and creates some bizarre phenomena. For example, in some festivals the prize money went not to the filmmaker, but to the sales agent or the local distributor. Well-known auteurs are promised or assured a slot in competition. Certain festivals nurture a particular kind of festival film such as the "Sundance film" which "often involving emotionally damaged characters, and featuring costume design as character short-hand" (41). Peranson laments that film critics are conditioned by this power system to minimize the aesthetic contributions of audience

festivals and concentrate their efforts on the larger business festivals. As we shall see in chapter 8, the business film festival can be credited with catapulting the career of Wong Kar Wai, who might otherwise have been drowned out in Hong Kong's mass market entertainment productions.

CIRCUIT MODEL

The disconnection of the above mentioned fields from one another hinders the understanding of Hong Kong cinema. I would propose a circuit model to connect the fields and integrate their approaches. I would add the finance and discourse sectors to the production-consumption circuit and situate the Hong Kong film industry in an international context.

Figure 1: Circuit Model



The discourse sector includes not only local critics, government censors, and the funding committee, but also international the film festival jury, overseas film critics and the academy. This sector has the discursive power and can translate such intangible power into material power. The finance sector includes not only the domestic theater owners who funded the production, but also overseas distributors, insurance companies, bankers and private financiers.

In the production sector, Hong Kong cinema followed the commercial cinema's rule of matching star, genre and market. It also had the industry auteur who is both industry savvy and yet projects a romantic image of an autonomous artist. But its organization was relatively horizontal and had a duo-department structure with the director heading the creative department and the producer leading the administrative department. Hong Kong filmmakers adopted a director-centric production approach with the producer playing a supportive role. Even though they also adopted the practice of writing by committee, the script was not used as blueprint for production as in Hollywood, and the screenwriter served more like the director's service provider. The directors with creative control were usually industry-savvy and served also as producers, writers and even agents. So I would propose to insert the authorship approach to Bordwell et al.'s capitalist machine model.

The Hong Kong film industry was weakest in the distribution sector but it also had more alternative platforms such as the European film festival, the American independent film festival and independent production, the traditional Southeast Asian market distribution network and the newer East Asian network. In the exhibition sector, Hong Kong cinema suffered most from the high rent land policy and censorship rules of the colonial government. The censorship rules gradually loosened up as Hong Kong approached 1997. The rent dropped during the financial crisis but so did the box office. The government set the political parameters by limiting what was legal to be shown to the public in local theaters. Theater owner-financiers set the economic parameters for the industry by funding what they thought was commercially viable. In the discourse sector, Hong Kong cinema was not affected by a government funding committee, which didn't exist during the colonial period. Local film critics did not diminish Wong Jing's career despite their incessant censure of his vulgarity, but they dubbed the Hong Kong New

Wave phenomenon and recognized Wong Kar Wai's artistry in his debut commercial film before he turned completely to art film productions. The finance sector, helping the industry to get a living space beyond its tiny domestic market and colonial government censorship, molded Hong Kong cinema into various forms such as regional cinema, Diaspora cinema, transnational cinema and implemented switching between the studio system and independent production.

Each sector is interrelated to each other. This is a system with multi-directional closed-circuit feedback loops. It was also autonomous in that it could run by itself and balance various historical forces. In the 1990s as a cottage industry heavily dependent on its constantly shifting overseas markets, it operated on a more horizontal and flexible organization structure. Like Hollywood, it had a market-driven system and relied on star and genre for its commercial operation. Like a national cinema, it was a space for non-Hollywood filmmaking. Like European cinema, it has its regional network, adopted a director-centric production approach, and served as a cultural forum to deal with common issues in East Asia. If it was like a bricoleur, borrowing bits and pieces everywhere, how did it develop its own system to adapt to its particular environment?

"Every business has its ups and downs. Have you ever seen Hong Kong cinema dead?...Hong Kong cinema is like a phoenix. Every time after the fire, it becomes prettier and flies higher. A phoenix will not be burnt by fire. The matter is how long we have to stay in the fire." *-Wong Jing*

SECTION II
THE BAMBOO CINEMA

HOW DID HONG KONG CINEMA, WITH ITS INHERENT SHORTAGE, SURVIVE IN A HOSTILE AND COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT?

In the 1990s Hong Kong cinema went through a trial of fire and is now in its glacial epoch. Wong Jing's comment above in 1995 might be overoptimistic, but the history of Hong Kong cinema has been, in fact, characterized by an alternation between death and rebirth. The development of Hong Kong and its cinema has not followed existing theoretical models. The Imperialist view of Hong Kong rising to become a modern metropolis, from a small fishing village, owing to the tranquility of colonization, is a myth. However, the dependency theory's crude prescription of "once colonized always devastated" cannot aptly describe Hong Kong either. Hong Kong had become a world-class city by the time of the sovereignty change, in contrast to dependency theory's assumption. There was an industrialization of the economy by the elite-group government, as world systems theory would assume, but the Hong Kong film industry was not part of a government economic plan. Its development was not steered by the state, and its history has not been characterized by succession of industry moguls. Neither the system of the industry, nor the movies were homogenized by Hollywood as Cultural imperialism theory would predict. In the 1990s Hong Kong cinema flourished throughout the world, by creating independent productions in a cottage industry without following the model of Hollywood as modernization theory would have predicted. It was

the opposite of the grand design of a modern business enterprise as Tino Balio describes of Hollywood in the 1930s. But Hong Kong cinema stayed with the people while ruling regimes came and went. During the imperialist era, the Chinese film industry could not keep the studios integrated when even the Chinese government could hardly keep the country integrated. During the postwar nation- building era in Asia, when protectionism was the norm, Hong Kong cinema was situated in an open port, and became an oddity for not being dominated by Hollywood. It survived without state protection and thrived without expanding like Hollywood. How did Hong Kong cinema survive the harsh conditions in the past and thrive in the competitive environment of the 1990s? The history of the Hong Kong film industry does not fit into a linear development model: from pre-modern to modern, from cottage industry to studio system, or from director cinema to producer cinema. Its development plainly did not follow Hollywood model. In Western culture, the Three Little Pigs fairy tale is enshrined with the moral that only the third pig's house, made of hard brick instead of straw and sticks, is the ultimate model of a house adequate to withstand the wolf's huff and puff. In real life it is impossible and impractical to build a hard brick house like Hollywood, without the political might and material power like that of the U.S. In the age of globalization a closed national market and insulated national cinema becomes unfeasible as the world's interdependence is heightened. Hong Kong cinema, situated in a colony, a diametrically opposite situation compared to the U.S.'s superpower status, could not exclude external actors from its domestic authority structure. In Chinese culture bamboo is a symbol of vitality and longevity because it survives by bending with the wind. This section is about how this bamboo cinema, situated in an open city, developed a system adapted to its particular insecure habitat and withstood the huff and puff of external forces, and explains how this commercial cinema of a non-sovereign entity successfully operated in a transnational

context. It was flexible not only at the production level, but also in its industry structure. At the production level, the "anything-goes" filmmaking style was practiced throughout the industry. The industry alternated between the studio system and independent production in accordance with the political and economic climate of Hong Kong and the region. Instead of expanding into a modern business, the history of Hong Kong cinema was characterized by mixture. In the 1990s it was like a juvenile centenarian: the films are vibrant and full of youthful energy, but the operation of the industry looked pre-modern despite its nearly one-hundred years of history. Its history was one of crumbling down and rebuilding. While Hollywood is like a pyramid with its perennial major studios as its broad foundation, Hong Kong cinema is like a collective of jugglers balancing on a moving unicycle. Nevertheless, Hong Kong cinema, with the city's geopolitical significance and various historical factors, enjoyed relative stability. There were some consistencies in Hong Kong cinema: it was consistently commercial and transnational, it adopted a director-centric production approach even in the studio era, and it adopted the same mode of financing (the "*pianhua*" system), and the matching of star-genre-market served as the key support of the industry. On the one hand there were forces that set the ground rules: the colonial government maintained political censorship and dictated what was legally permissible to be shown in local theaters, while the exhibition sector-financiers insisted on greater economic control in prescribing what star and genre were commercially viable. But on the other hand filmmakers were breaking these restrictions by exploring alternative financing, distribution, and exhibition options. In the production sectors there were changes in practice to keep up with the times as Hong Kong cinema broadened its overseas markets. There were various cultural translators to help promote Hong Kong cinema's cross-cultural appeal, and yet the production approach remained focused on supporting the directors. The post of art director was newly created since the

Hong Kong New Wave generation had to keep up with modern packaging and marketing. The was a rise of women production executives to deal with the increasingly complicated financial and administrative logistics of runaway productions, and the new younger generation of screenwriters humbled themselves to become service providers for the director. Like Hollywood, the source of the strengths of Hong Kong cinema also came from within, i.e. reaching an equilibrium by balancing various historical forces. While in classical Hollywood the studios were the sites of a convergence of forces, in Hong Kong it's the entire film industry, which was collectively almost the size of one Hollywood studio, balanced various social, industrial, technological, economic, and aesthetic forces.

Hong Kong cinema has both the positive and negative symbolic characteristics of bamboo. Situated in a hybrid culture, it can be disavowed as "jūksīng" (bamboo cane), one that is hollow on the inside because of its impure Chinese culture and nomadic characteristics, but it can also be embraced as part of the nation's heritage by being the cultural bridge between the East and West. It likewise can serve as a link between the modern and the traditional, like a bamboo scaffold still being used in constructing modern architecture. Hong Kong cinema entered the modern world market with its traditional perennial genre, the martial arts film. In the West it can be seen as the dated chopsocky in Chinatown video shops, but can also be appropriated for high tech sci-fi in Hollywood. Unlike the traumatic interruptions experienced by commercial cinema in China and Taiwan, Hong Kong commercial cinema has had a continuous history of prolific filmmaking. It adapted to its extreme environment by bending with circumstances to the point of being seemingly spineless. Like bamboo as a strong building material, it could survive harsh conditions and grow easily, extremely quickly and in multiple climates. In the 1980s and early 1990s Hong Kong cinema grew very quickly, became dominant in Asia, and ruthlessly drove out its competitors' productions. In the 1990s it

boomed like the ominous bamboo blossoming when the industry was in a dire situation. We have yet to see if it can again bounce back and grow like bamboo shoots after the spring rain. The following two chapters are about how Hong Kong cinema worked in the past and in the 1990s in its specific historical context. In the past, Hong Kong, being a British colony with the China reunification factor looming on the horizon, has survived by maintaining an unsteady balance between the British and the Chinese forces. Situated in such a precarious city, Hong Kong cinema has survived by maintaining its flexibility by constantly adapting its industrial structure and filmmaking practice, without being forced to insulate itself like national cinema or being compelled to expand like Hollywood. During the transition period in the 1990s with the political anxiety induced by the Sino-British conflict, economic fluctuation due to speculative and international forces, and social instability due to a massive outmigration of the middle class and accumulated hidden social conflicts, Hong Kong was like a jungle on fire. To maintain its competitive edge to survive in an intensified global market, the Hong Kong film industry further streamlined itself like a legless bird, cutting off all means of retreat and subordinating its long-term interests to immediate survival.

The development pattern of Hong Kong cinema shows the inadequacy of existing theories and methodologies in dealing with the film industry of a non-nation entity like Hong Kong. Hong Kong cinema was born under unusual circumstances. It was an oddity in the world in the past, and a theoretical conundrum in the present, but it is not an exceptional case as we can see in view of the recent rise of other East Asian cinemas, also from countries in a political limbo status. They, too, are exploring their own paths, developing systems adapted to their particular habitat and do not indiscriminately imitate the Hollywood model or have a government powerful enough to enduringly block out any intervention from external forces.

Chapter 4: A Flexible Cinema in a Precarious City

Hong Kong cinema has its inherent deficiencies. The domestic market was petite and the film industry was miniscule. Situated in a dependent territory, it went through multiple threats of annihilation and debilitating censorship by various regimes. Located at the geographical periphery of China, as a dialect cinema for mass entertainment operating in a Western power's colony and characterized by low budget commercial quickies, it suffered cultural denigration due to its marginal status in Chinese culture. Annexed as a trade port and located at the South gate of China, with its population made up mostly of refugees and migrants who constantly migrated in and out, Hong Kong society was characterized by its mobile population and social unrest. Life in this city in the early years was not associated with harmony, stability or prosperity. Hong Kong before the 1990s suffered political uncertainty, economic instability, social unrest, and cultural denigration and it never had a gradual and independent development. Despite all of these handicaps, the Hong Kong film industry maintained prolific record of filmmaking long before the Hong Kong economy took off in the late 1970s. How did Hong Kong cinema cope with adversity in the early years in an adaptive manner and bounce back?

The history of Hong Kong and Hong Kong cinema has been characterized more by chaos and uncertainty than tranquility and predictability. From personal life planning to business operation to government administration, long-term planning and elaborate research and development were more the exception than the norm. The Hong Kong film industry, with its studio system being more the exception than the norm, unlike Schatz's description of classical Hollywood with four decades of relative stability, was never in extended equilibrium. As Ming K. Chan argues, "maintaining a precarious balance" was the key to Hong Kong's survival from the early colonial days to the early 1990s.[32] The

survival of Hong Kong cinema was also characterized by maintaining a precarious balance, and a constant renewal of its system and films to adapt to its constantly changing milieu. In the last one hundred years there were multiple pronouncements of the death of Hong Kong cinema, indicating both the grave situations that Hong Kong cinema had constantly been facing, and the strength of Hong Kong cinema to prevail. Before the 1990s, the history of Hong Kong cinema is characterized by rapid cycles of boom and bust. Hong Kong cinema and its filmmakers, with no control over its external environment, adapted to the changing local, regional and international environments not only by being flexible down at the level of everyday filmmaking practice, but also up to the level of market structure transformation. The early years have prepared Hong Kong cinema to develop adaptive mechanisms early on to survive in Hong Kong's precarious political, economic and cultural context. These mechanisms enabled filmmakers, who thrived in the chaos and facilitated Hong Kong cinema, to survive in the 1990s, a decade characterized by intense political anxiety and economic fluctuation caused by globalization and sovereignty change. Over the years Hong Kong cinema has developed a successful adaptive defense system to fit its particular volatile habitat.

Hong Kong cinema has many inherent deficiencies when compared to Hollywood, but it also has a lot of inherent competitive advantages when compared with neighboring cinemas, especially Chinese and Taiwanese cinemas. For example, due to various historical contingencies, paradoxically, Hong Kong benefited from the world's asymmetric power structure and became a privileged player while it was still a colony, and Hong Kong cinema gained structural and cultural advantages from Hong Kong's strategic geopolitical position. When compared with neighboring countries in Asia, Hong Kong was relatively stable and better off. Politically, despite its colonial status, it went through only one colonization event without the scale of bloodshed and destruction

experienced by other former colonies. Economically, despite its vulnerability, it was congruently defined and supported as an economic city by the major powers and thus prospered as a trading port. Socially, despite its highly mobile population (40% plus born-outside-Hong Kong population and continual two-way immigration), the majority of the population is Chinese, speaking the local dialect and saving Hong Kong from severe ethnic conflict but also benefiting the city with a dynamic cultural exchange and youthful population as in other immigrant societies. Culturally, despite the marginalization of its Southern and colonial culture, Hong Kong is situated at the junction of two major network civilizations, namely the "chopstick culture" of the Chinese and the Anglosphere of the English. Such a combination of hybrid culture makes Hong Kong's cultural products accessible to a large part of the world's population. What follows is the paradoxical history of Hong Kong and Hong Kong cinema. Politically as a colony Hong Kong was a midget survivor in international politics; Economically, it was a giant in the region and in the world, but vulnerable to international and speculative forces; Socially, it was a significant transfer port of the global Chinese social nexus; Culturally it was a conjoined twin by being at the junction of English and Chinese cultures. Operating in such a city, Hong Kong cinema was a political Laputa not tied to any grounded territory and ruling regime, an industrial amoeba changing its form when it moved and a cultural chameleon that changed its outlook according to its target markets.

A PRECARIOUS CITY

Despite the vicissitudes on the outside, the colonial government and later the SAR government maintained a certain consistency in ruling Hong Kong, such as the colonial governmental features, the trade-oriented economic policy, and a lop-sided economic development structure as well as an acquiescence to corporate domination. The governmental system of Hong Kong was a peculiar kind of democracy: co-opting the

Chinese elites while claiming consensus building. After World War II with the rapid defeat of the British in Asia, the myth of the invincibility of the British Empire was destroyed and the rise of independence movements in Asia seriously challenged the colonial government's legitimacy. The need for a consensus government prompted the growth of advisory committees. The colonial state claimed it was a "government by consultation" but in fact the government only listened to the elites (S. W. K. Chiu; Manuel). The advice from the committees had to be approved by the Legislative Council and Executive Council and from the late 19th century to the 1980s. These two councils were made up of representatives appointed by the governor rather than popularly elected by the society. In 1951, for example, Stephen W. K. Chiu quotes from Sorby's study (1968) (S. W. K. Chiu 154) almost all of the unofficial members of the two councils were businessmen from the banking industry, merchant 'hongs', property development, and public utilities. There were no representatives from the working class. It was an executive-led government. As C. K. Lau points out, the quintessential art of government in Hong Kong was consensus building (30). As Gren Manuel describes, in the 1970s and 1980s the government would attempt to defend unpopular policies by saying that they had been passed by an advisory committee (245). The British perfected this arrangement of co-opting the Chinese elite into the system, but the last governor Patten attempted to introduce political reform in Hong Kong. With the rise of political parties, this old system inevitably became undesirable. Nevertheless, when SAR Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa came to power, he not only revived this old system, but also set up many more committees and advisory bodies. Manuel points out that almost every aspect of life had a government advisory committee to look after it. However, like the colonial government, the SAR government has a bias towards lawyers and businessmen. The Democrats and grassroots organizations were systematically excluded from a lot of the committees.

Manuel quotes from DeGolyer that at the time of the handover, Tung's advisers were almost all businessmen aged over 50 who were born in China. DeGolyer predicted that Tung would end up out of touch with the community. In Tung's Elderly Commission, whose purpose was to help the elderly poor, there were no elderly members on the committee and women were underrepresented as usual.

The economic development of Hong Kong was consistently lopsided. The economic power transition in Hong Kong was smooth and it began long before the Sino-British talks in the 1980s. It started at the grass-root level without state intervention. As Stephen W. K. Chiu analyzes, in other post-colonial countries, ethnic cleavage was a major factor in shaping the state-capital relationship with state intervention. In Hong Kong, British capital dominated the Hong Kong economy and the power of hongs and banks was even higher than that of the governor. But there was no ethnic conflict between the colonialists and the indigenous society. When Hong Kong Chinese businessmen started to challenge the British hongs monopoly in the late 1970s, this didn't prompt the state to intervene. The Chinese businessmen meticulously planned the buying and selling of shares in the stock market, an open game originally set up by the British merchants. From the 1950s to the 1970s, it was the peak of British hongs' monopoly of the stock market. But like their diplomatic corps back in 1898, arrogance characterized the British hongs and colony state. As we shall later, uncertainty of the future gave local Chinese industrialists an advantage over the British traders who made blunders in the market and eventually lost out to the Chinese. In the 1990s, the stock market remained the major arena of business battles. The property market became the driving force of economic growth and was open to international competition. Hong Kong remained a free port with an open economy as the British originally planned. As a demonstration unit of "one country two systems," Hong Kong's raison d'etre remained the same. It was still

defined as an economic city no matter whom the sovereign power was. Stability and prosperity are of paramount importance for business. The Hong Kong film industry, like other Hong Kong Chinese industries before the 1970s, was not taken over by the state and British hongs. Commercial film making remained in the hands of the Chinese and was never interrupted (except during the Japanese occupation) as in China and Taiwan.

The Hong Kong economy, characterized by corporate feudalism, was far from a neoclassical utopia. Throughout history, the Hong Kong economy was never laissez-faire and non-market forces played a key role in steering its development. As a colony, Hong Kong's economy started as typically colonial with the British monopolizing the major sectors of finance, transportation, public utilities and trading, etc. The role of the administration was to protect the interests of the trade-finance complex. Richard Hughes sums up the concentration of power and wealth in Hong Kong in his 1968 book: "Power in Hong Kong, it has been said, resides in the Jockey Club, Jardine and Matheson, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank and the Governor – in that order" (17). During the Cold War, the U.S.'s maneuvers restructured the Hong Kong economy so as to keep Hong Kong a free port (Turner 130). Like other developed countries, Hong Kong had China serving as its economic hinterland, supplying low price foodstuffs since the 1950s (Schiffer) and cheap labor and materials since the Open Door policy. In the 1970s the British hongs were gradually acquired by Chinese- owned corporations. In the 1990s, the players and the playing field became more international, but the Hong Kong economy remained dominated by the corporations.

As Ming K. Chan points out, Hong Kong as a Chinese city under British rule survived the last one and a half centuries by maintaining a precarious balance between China and Britain ("Hong Kong's Precarious" 5). Besides these two sovereign powers, there were other powers shaping the development of Hong Kong. Japan's victory in Asia,

however brief, forever changed the British Empire's position of supremacy in Asia. The United States, replacing Britain as the hegemonic power in the world, played a significant role in re-assembling the balance of power in the region and shaping the development of East Asia. Japan bounced back and became the most affluent country in the region, and the Newly Industrializing Economies (NIEs), like the Asian Four Tigers, rose up with the United States' assistance. One hundred and fifty years ago, Hong Kong started as a Crown colony with a typical colonial comprador economy with key economic sectors dominated by the British hongs and the society suffering under Apartheid. But, one and a half centuries later, Hong Kong became a Chinese-dominated cosmopolitan city. This change of political sovereignty occurred without any violent anti-colonialism bloodshed. The shift of economic dominion from the British to the Chinese happened without a drastic nationalization campaign. Hong Kong changed from a fishing village to a world-class city without fanfare. What was consistent amidst this dramatic transformation was that Hong Kong remained a de-politicized free port and expanding cultural nexus. To maintain the delicate balance of power in the region, it was in the major powers' interest to keep Hong Kong politically neutralized and economically fortified. There was no civilizing mission by the British, or cultural mission by the Communists. Throughout its history, Hong Kong has served as the transit station of people, capital and goods. This particular historical context provides a structural and cultural context that has favored a transnational commercial cinema.

In international politics Hong Kong is a dwarf vulnerable to the major powers' pressure. However, despite Hong Kong's marginal political status, it occupies a significant geopolitical position to those with vested interest in the region. Being treated as an atypical colony by Britain and given a Special Administrative Region (SAR) status by China is indicative of Hong Kong's political leverage. In response to the changing

international and domestic political scene, the government policy has been adaptive. With the rise and fall of Empires and coming and going of power blocs, there was also a power shift in domestic politics. The administration style of Hong Kong changed from that of a high-handed colonial government, to an executive-led government with advisory committees. The government made further accommodations as the local Chinese rose in power in the economic realm and with the growing significance of the China factor in Hong Kong's affairs.

The foreign policies and rise and fall of the three major powers (Britain, China and the United States) greatly influenced the fate and shaped the development of Hong Kong. Hong Kong was originally annexed as the British Empire's Far East outpost. Britain's particular imperialist policy in East Asia had changed the post-colonial fate of East Asia to be considerably different from that of the other continents. The China factor never diminished in Hong Kong and in the region, despite the shattering of the Celestial Empire in the 19th century and the containment of Communist China in the mid-20th century. In the late-20th century China's economic reform and national unitary plan made Hong Kong a peculiar part of China and made the Hong Kong-China connection ever more important to each other. The United States replaced Great Britain as the world's hegemonic power after World War II. Its Cold War political engineering had an enormous impact on the contour of development in the Asia Pacific region. Its economic involvement in Hong Kong restructured the Hong Kong economy to be more open to the world. What these major powers all had in common in their Hong Kong policy was an intention to keep Hong Kong politically neutral, economically strong and socially stable. To protect their vested interests, no extreme interruption or radical action was permitted.

Britain's imperialist policy in China and Hong Kong was different from that on other continents. Unlike other former colonies in Asia, Hong Kong went through only

one colonizer, Britain, and it returned to its previous sovereign state, China. Both Britain and later China regarded Hong Kong first and foremost an economic city. As Steve Tsang argues, the British Empire in East Asia was primarily interested in trade and economic benefits rather than in territorial acquisition. Britain had no intention to exploit and develop Hong Kong's natural resources. Nor did it have a civilizing mission. As Tsang puts it, the British policy in China was a classic manifestation of "imperialism of free trade."[33] Instead of scrambling for concessions with other powers, the British preferred China to be kept in one piece, whereby the trade between Britain and Hong Kong would serve as an important conduit to the China trade. It was in the British interest to maintain Hong Kong as an apolitical commercial city and detached from the politics in China. As Tsang analyzed, "(Hong Kong) Located at the edge of China, with promoting trade and economic exchanges with China as its raison d'etre, the interests of the British, which were overwhelmingly economic, could not be advanced by Hong Kong being embroiled in Chinese politics" (*Modern History* 83). Britain's policy for Hong Kong was to ensure Hong Kong was politically detached from Chinese politics, socially stable and economically active. The China factor always loomed over Hong Kong and kept Britain in check. Unlike other colonies, Hong Kong was only on lease.34 Unlike other territories that China was forced to lease in the 1890s, the lease of Hong Kong ran its full 99-year course. Although the political status of Hong Kong actually depended on the rise and fall of major powers, China, interestingly, honored this lease, even though it was signed under a humiliatingly unequal treaty. There has been a long tradition of Chinese resistance to British colonial rule in Hong Kong since 1840s (R. Cai). In the postwar years, the China factor was evident in many local resistance incidents (Tsang). Geographically, China is attached to Hong Kong, but it did not take advantage of earlier opportunities to claim back Hong Kong despite widespread independent movements

against Western colonial rule in Asia. It was to China's advantage to keep Hong Kong as an outlet to the outside world during the Cold War containment. After World War II the major powers' balance of power in Asia was upset. With Britain's rapid defeat, the British Empire in Southeast Asia and East Asia was disintegrating, but Britain never intended to relinquish its rule over Hong Kong. During the 1966-67 riots, the British colonial government, with its legitimacy seriously challenged, adopted a more accommodating approach in Hong Kong and worked out a more delicate diplomatic relationship with China. To maintain their sovereignty over Hong Kong, the primary focus of British foreign policy was to avoid any provocation of China. It was to Britain's advantage not to carry out any oppressive cultural mission to provoke further anti-colonial rule riots, and it was out of such pragmatic considerations, not the colonial government's benign neglect, that Hong Kong cinema was allowed a living space. The governance between 1967 and 1997 was so "soft" that Robert E. Mitchell coins it "Velvet Colonialism." During this time, the government pursued various pro-stability policies. For example, it developed a more transparent and efficient legal and institutional structure that encouraged trade and investment. It also adopted a more pro-active approach to social issues, such as the massive housing program where half of the population is presently residing.[35] More advisory committees were set up to build a more consensus-based government. Laws were established to restrict popular participation activities to prevent politically-inspired disruptions. In the post war years Hong Kong was a haven for the refugee-created population. The China factor that kept British colonialism in check, however, also impeded the development of democracy in Hong Kong. As C. K. Lau points out, Hong Kong changed from crown colony government system to an executive-led government. What was consistently absent was democratic politics. Since the 1840s, Hong Kong was run by the "Crown colony government" system

like other British colonies. After World War II, the British Colonial Office started political reforms to prepare its colonies for self-government. However, the unstable situation in China in 1952 prompted the officials to halt the reforms in Hong Kong, and in 1953 the film censorship policy was officially established. Britain never intended to let go of Hong Kong, and China would never allow Hong Kong to be independent. What was absolutely certain was, in the case of Hong Kong, either as a British colony or a part of China, it would never be allowed autonomy.

The ending of British colonial rule did not give Hong Kong more democracy. The sovereignty change was meticulously planned for more than a decade in advance to ensure a smooth transition. Hong Kong citizens were excluded in the Sino-British talks over the future of Hong Kong. After 1997, China would retain the colony governmental features and capitalist system in Hong Kong, by observing the principle of "one country two systems," a model originally designed for Taiwan. As Lee Kim-ming and Jack Yue Wai-chik point out, the Tung Chee Hwa administration demonstrated close continuity with the preceding colonial regime. "The continuity is a logical corollary of the 'through-train' arrangement for a Hong Kong civil service…" As a demonstration unit of this political experiment as its *raison d'etre*, Hong Kong has to maintain "stability and prosperity." The interests of China – territorial integrity and economic modernization – could not be advanced by Hong Kong interfering with China's politics. Hong Kong is now part of China, but like Britain, China does not want Hong Kong being involved in Chinese politics either. China has no civilizing mission to stir up this colonial city, and promised not to make changes in Hong Kong for 50 years (i.e. until year 2046). This smooth transition in Hong Kong is in contrast with other turbulent and disruptive sovereignty changes and nationalist movements in Asia. Hong Kong was handled as an economic city with a pre-determined transfer schedule. The China factor kept British

colonialism in check, but it also contained Hong Kong's democratic development. Social stability was of paramount importance in government policy during the transition period.

The United States's Hong Kong policy, though almost imperceptible, greatly influenced Hong Kong's economic structure. It made Hong Kong's economy ever more open to the world and thus more vulnerable to international crisis. The United States replaced Great Britain as the new hegemonic power and assumed supremacy in the realms of the military, finance, commerce, industry and ideology after World War II. Interestingly, Hong Kong remaining a British colony shielded it from the United States' open and direct interference. During the Cold War years, the United States' foreign policy in the Pacific was focused on containing the communist bloc, which included Soviet Union, China and North Korea. The United States constructed the capitalist bloc to encircle and isolate the communist bloc. It provided economic aid, loans, industrial contracts, and opened its domestic markets to its East Asian allies like Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. The United States' patronage of its capitalist allies and its assault on communist enemies in East Asia had a profound impact on the contour of development in this region (Lai and So). The economic development in East Asia was geared towards international trade and integration into the world's capitalist system. The 1980s witnessed the rise of the Asian Four Tigers, the economic miracle achieved by four Asian Newly Industrializing Economies (NIEs), namely Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore. Hong Kong was not the United States' ally, but given the significance of Hong Kong's geopolitical position, Hong Kong fell within the United States' plan. As Yu and Cheng analyze, the United States had no Hong Kong policy before World War II. But in 1942-1960, the United States' Hong Kong policy was to maintain Hong Kong as a free port for international trade (Q. Yu and S. Cheng). To maintain Hong Kong's openness to the world, the United States, as leader of the free world, supported Britain to

continue its colonial rule over Hong Kong instead of returning Hong Kong to Chang Kai-shek's Chinese government. Free trade was the United States' Cold War long-term weapon against the communist bloc. Matthew Turner insightfully points out the contrast of Britain's oversight and aloofness with the United States' attentive involvement in Hong Kong's economy in the post-war years. For example, "Britain had excluded the colony from direct economic aid since 1945 and offered no assistance to the several million refuges throughout the 1950s. By contrast, the United States gave US$3 million in direct aid, together with US$6 million in food" (39). To monitor the economic embargo the United States' research on Hong Kong's economy and industries was much more thorough than the perfunctory work done by the colonial government. The United States' reports on Hong Kong factories included the work environment, new industries and potential for United States' direct investment. Turner describes the results of the United States' economic policy in Hong Kong as "first destroyed, then rebuilt Hong Kong's economy…" "The twists and turns of a Cold War policy that first prevented, then promoted, and finally controlled Hong Kong domestic exports…" (37). The United Sttes greatly influenced Hong Kong industrialists, traders, and designers and its policies were translated into products. Hong Kong's export-oriented manufacturing industries swiftly adapted to the United States' changing politics, policy and economic fluctuation. Turner describes the Hong Kong model as flexible, diversified and imitative. Yu and Cheng's analysis was based on newly partially de-classified documents. Interestingly, the United States' post war Hong Kong policy was so indirect and imperceptible that even the Committee on Foreign Relations of the United States Senate believed that Hong Kong was not on the radar of American foreign policy until as late as 1992 (Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, 1992). Britain was the United States' ally. Hong Kong, as a protectorate of Britain in its role as a diminished empire, dodged direct

interference from the United States, the much stronger rising power.[36] Nevertheless, the United States' policy was influential in restructuring the Hong Kong economy to cater to the United States' needs. The Hong Kong economy was made to be responsive to world market changes. It was so wide open that it became vulnerable to speculative economic activities and international crisis.

Hong Kong went through the British Empire's velvet colonialism of economic revival, the United States' intense economic involvement, and integration into China, which was also heading to get on the global track. From Britain's imperialism of free trade, to the United States' internationalism of the free port, to China's nationalism of economic reform, Hong Kong was congruently defined as an economic city in their policies. In this international politics of free trade Hong Kong was politically neutered. Prosperity and stability have taken precedence over democracy. No democratic politics was encouraged by the United States or under the British or Chinese rule. In the interstices of international politics, Hong Kong survives but has remained vulnerable. Nevertheless, the post-war British Empire was diminished, the United States' interference in Hong Kong was indirect and post-Mao China's policy on Hong Kong was pragmatic. To maintain the delicate balance of power in Hong Kong and in the region, Hong Kong government policy was to avoid radical interruption and provocation. Generations of Hong Kong administrators have been adept in the tradition of negotiation and compromise to adapt to the changing environment. The early political formation of Hong Kong shapes a political culture of pragmatism and moderation and a society of ambivalent dual-allegiance, providing a favorable atmosphere and a fertile environment for the entertainment industry.

In the economic realm Hong Kong was a vulnerable giant. Throughout its colonial history Hong Kong was resolutely maintained as a free port to the world. Hong

Kong's small and open economy made it susceptible to the attack of international speculative activities. In Hong Kong, an apt pupil of capitalism, the power shift in the economic realm was drastic even without changes in political sovereignty. In ancient Chinese history, Hong Kong was remote from China's economic center in the north. To the 19th century British Empire it was a "barren rock"[37] and to the world, it was not even on the map yet. But, by the end of 20th century, its economic growth was ahead of its motherland. In 1995 it was eighth in the world, in terms of trading volume (Mo 82). It was the financial and communication center of the region with a per capita GDP higher than its first-world colonizer.[38] Contrary to the expected destiny of a former colony, Hong Kong transformed from a typical colonial comprador economy with the British dominating it, to a modern cosmopolitan economy with the local Chinese business in control. In the 1990s, Hong Kong remained a free port and open economy as the British originally planned. But the economy was much more locally driven and internationalized, instead of solely under the domination of British oligarchic power blocs. Contrary to the claim of a purposive laissez-faire policy, the colonial government economic policy has been adaptive and conservative in response to external factors. Contrary to the expected fate of a small city with no protector, Hong Kong not only survived, but thrived despite desperate circumstances such as the British Empire's extortion for foreign exchange in the post-war years, the United States' blocking of Chinese trade and interfering in East Asia economies, and the growing power of Communist China etc. As Hong Kong's economy got more China- and regionally-oriented, Hong Kong corporations ventured further into the international market. In Chinese history, Hong Kong is located at the tip of the "Southern Barbarian" region vis-à-vis the Central Plain of the Celestial Empire.[39] It was far away from the economic center in the north. Since the Ming dynasty (1366-1644), southern provinces of China like Chiuchow and Canton emerged as the cultural

middlemen of a multi-cultural network as a result of China's multi-national network of investment and trade (Fok). In the 19th century, the arrival of Western imperialists from the sea created trading centers along the coastal treaty ports. Foreign invasions, government corruption, civil war and various disasters have caused turmoil in China for the last couple of centuries. People from the devastated Southern coastal area looked for asylum or economic opportunities overseas, particularly in Southeast Asia and North America. These overseas Chinese gradually formed a bamboo network: a financial and social network of ethnic Chinese. The Taiping Movement (1851-1864), the largest peasant uprising in China's history, drove people from the Southern provinces further down to Hong Kong seeking asylum. Under British jurisdiction and shielded from Chinese political struggles, Hong Kong gradually replaced Canton as the main exchange center of labor, goods and capital for the international bamboo network. Hong Kong benefited from British administration and became a privileged player in the world ahead of its neighbor. Very early on, the government built the infrastructure and set the policy for international trade, originally meant to benefit the British corporations. But astute Hong Kong Chinese were quick to exploit their opportunities. As in other colonies, Hong Kong's economy was altered by the imperialist powers. Local primary industries like fishing and agriculture gradually declined. But unlike other crown colonies, Hong Kong was not utilized to produce raw materials and foodstuffs for the empire's industrialized metropolitan center and thus avoided retarding its own industrialization and development. Initially Hong Kong was used by the British as a giant warehouse for the opium trade. It developed quickly in the shipping, financial and telecommunication sectors and after the banning of the opium trade, trading became diversified. The telephone was introduced in Hong Kong one year after its invention. More infrastructures for international trade, such as a complicated currency exchange and remittance system, promotion of tourism as well

as an adherence to a free port policy and small government were established in the early colonial days (Tsang *Modern History;* Faure and Lee). Very early on the colonial government's economic policy established itself as conservative and adaptive. The government's strong adherence to a conservative financial policy has facilitated Hong Kong's financial autonomy. Britain's emphasis on the colonies' financial solvency and self-sufficiency reinforced the financial conservatism of the colonial state. As Stephen W. K. Chiu points out, both the colonial government and the Colonial Office were anxious to maintain the colonies' financial solvency in order to protect their administrative independence. The financial policy in Hong Kong was extremely conservative. Hong Kong was annexed only as a conduit for China trade. Britain did not intend to pay for administering this "borrowed" trading port, so Hong Kong had to limit itself to a small government and minimum public expenses. Prior to the Second World War, the colonial government was run by only 33 administrative officers, occupying 23 offices (Tsang *Modern History* 24). After the war in the late 1950s, there were still fewer than 50 administrative officers (Mo 165). In the early 1950s, the size of the public sector was below 10%. Even at its highest, it was only 20%, still lower than the 30% of the United States and Japan, two contemporary market economy countries (Mo 97). The colonial government had only limited liability and expenses owed to the citizens in terms of social security. There was little expenditure on national security, a major factor for the growing size of governments in many countries in the post-war years. As Hong Kong was not a nation-state, it could not get foreign loans like a developing country in the case of financial crisis. After the war, the Hong Kong government consistently maintained a budgetary surplus in order to avoid financial control by the British Treasury (Tsang *Modern History*). In the few decades after the war, the Hong Kong government accumulated a tremendous amount of financial reserves, which was rare in the world (Mo

102). Such a conservative financial policy allowed Hong Kong to be financially autonomous from its colonizer Britain, and also avoid emergency assistance from the world's largest loaner, the United States. This conservative financial policy allowed Hong Kong (and the Hong Kong film industry) to circumvent Britain and the United States' financial interference. However, the governance in Hong Kong was not actually planning ahead, contrary to conventional belief, which credits Hong Kong economic boom to a purposeful positive non-interventionism or laissez-faire policy.[40] The colonial government's policy for the development of Hong Kong was not guided by any foundational ideological schema, constitution, or following the spirit of any founding father, but simply by pragmatism: just being adaptive to their circumstances. Hong Kong's early colonial years were characterized by a British-dominated comprador economy focusing narrowly on trading. The British dominated the key sectors of the Hong Kong economy, such as the public utilities, public transportation, telecommunication, banking, shipment, real estate and hotels, etc. The Taipans of the British hongs were also members of the Legislative Council and the Executive Council, influencing the major political and economic affairs of Hong Kong (B. Feng). Chinese compradors acted as translators and middlemen. The majority of the local Chinese population, left alone by the government, were workers or engaged in trading business termed "South and North stores" serving China and Chinese Diaspora communities mainly in Southeast Asia and North America. These "South and North store" business activities, rarely documented by the colonial government, were already quite prosperous and of large scale. As the regional and global situations changed, within a few decades, Hong Kong went through two major rapid economic transformations: the industrialization in the 1950s, and economic diversification in late 1970s. Both are associated with China. Hong Kong Chinese businesses took advantage of the

opportunities that presented themselves. These transformations simultaneously pushed the Hong Kong economy to be more open to the world, and closer to an economic integration with China. The rapid industrialization in the 1950s extended Hong Kong's financial network and its role as a major trading center. The revival of Hong Kong's industry was, in fact, facilitated instead of being repressed by the British. The industrialization helped the rise of the previously neglected Chinese industrialists who later replaced the British hongs as the dominant bloc in Hong Kong's economy. In the 1950s, the United Nations' and the United States' embargo against trading with China ended Hong Kong's role as China's premier entrepôt. After the Second World War, the deterioration of Britain's industrial economy and the sterling crisis made Hong Kong's financial contribution significant to the diminished British Empire, especially during the period of decolonization and the uncertain allegiance of former colonies to the sterling. Previously, British trade-oriented economic policy in Hong Kong overlooked Chinese industries, which were already established in the pre-war years. But in the post-war years, Hong Kong Chinese manufacturing enterprises were actively revived and promoted by the government in order to earn foreign exchange. As Alex H.K. Choi quotes from Susan Strange's studies, it was "a bizarre situation, whereby foreign exchanges earned by tiny Hong Kong had become a major pillar supporting the ailing sterling empire" (qtd. in Choi 185). By 1967, £350 million, one-third of Britain's total reserves, had been transferred from Hong Kong to be deposited in London. From the 1950s to the 1970s, it was the peak of the British hongs' monopoly. Before the 1970s, the hongs occupied 70% of listed companies and they dominated every major economic sector except the industrial sector. Arrogance characterized the British hongs, and they defined the colony state and entrepôt trade as the sole raison d'etre of Hong Kong. The British merchants lacked interest in industrial development and left the entire manufacturing sector to the Chinese. As Ngo

Tak-wing points out, the manufacturing industry, which gradually became the largest employment sector, was developed totally outside the imperial plan and the hongs' activities. This rapid industrialization generated new trade. It reinforced and expanded Hong Kong's role as a major trading center and turned Hong Kong into an entrepôt for the East Asia region. In addition, it induced the local Chinese and the expatriates to work more closely together. The Shanghai immigrant entrepreneurs, unlike their Cantonese counterparts, broke the barrier between the local Chinese and the expatriate communities. They approached British banks for loans for their enterprises. The British banks then started to get involved in financing the local manufacturing sector. As Tsang analyzes, "The British banks had the financial resources, expertise and ready access to the rest of the world through their excellent international financial networks. They became available to the local Chinese entrepreneurs who surpassed the long-established British hongs in exploiting the economic opportunities."(*Modern History* 167) Consequently, the financial network for Hong Kong entrepreneurs extended from the traditional bamboo network to East Asia and the world. As Tsang concludes, the British banks helped the local industrialists enter the international market. Hong Kong's economy took off towards the end of the 1960s. "It combined to good effect the resources of entrepreneurial industrialists, expert exporters, trade financiers and international bankers" (Tsang *Modern History* 167). Taking advantage of the British financial resources, expertise and networks, local Chinese businesses went beyond the traditional ethnic Chinese markets. Interestingly, British colonization enabled Hong Kong Chinese businesses financially, and allowed them to expand globally.

The 1970s diversification of the Hong Kong economy turned Hong Kong into a modern international financial center and capital market. By 1970s, as Tsang describes, "Hong Kong had a solid industrial base, excellent trade networks, modern international

banking, insurance and other business servicing facilities, a vibrant domestically driven local economy, an increasingly educated workforce, and efficient public services to support and sustain a modern economy" (*Modern History* 174). In 1972, with the United States' President Richard Nixon visiting China, the diplomatic breakthrough and lifting of the embargo heralded China's opening to the world. Hong Kong's old role as the premier entrepôt of China was restored. Hong Kong's financial and commercial services boomed (Mo). In 1978, the lifting of a restrictive moratorium on new banking licenses attracted major foreign and international banks, including leading international merchant banks. As Tsang describes, their presence made Hong Kong more attractive to other major business servicing sectors, such as international law partnerships, accountancies and firms of consultants (*Modern History*). Hong Kong was turned into a leading modern international financial center. It was also a major capital market for local entrepreneurs, and the region as a whole, especially for the fast-growing economy of China. The growth was driven by a generation of younger local entrepreneurs with modern Western educations and management knowledge. In the 1990s, China replaced the United States as Hong Kong's major trading partner. The Hong Kong Chinese industrialists, previously neglected, accumulated capital and ventured into the real estate sector. As Feng Bangyan analyzes, the British hongs, due to the uncertainty of their long term commitment to this city, gradually lost out to the Chinese businesses after making blunders in their business strategies, in the manufacturing sector, real estate sector and the stock market. In the 1990s, the stock market remained the major arena of business battles and the property market became the driving force of economic growth and was open to international competition.

While there were the local Chinese conglomerates, the modern Hong Kong economy was also populated by "Small and Medium Enterprises" (SMEs). In the 1990s,

over 50% of Hong Kong's firms were SMEs. This can be attributed to the colonial government's post-war pro-stability economic policies, such as micro-economic intervention. As Jonathan R. Schiffer points out, the system of the Hong Kong economy was not an unfettered capitalism, despite the absence of macroeconomic development planning and government subsidies of industries. Non-market forces intervened significantly in all factor markets such as labor and land. For example, the government oversaw the regulation and steady supply of staple, highly subsidized public housing, and expanded human capital expenditure to ensure the workforce had the requisite amount of health, education and shelter to enable it to function properly in an industrial society. These actions contributed to economic stability and laid the cornerstone for the export-oriented economy. In colonial Hong Kong, all land was Crown land and its supply was under government control. Government policy bended the land and labor markets to privilege certain types of industrial users. All these were favorable to the development of small-scale industries which were the backbone of Hong Kong's export-led economic growth. In the regional context, the rapid growth of East Asia economies provided Hong Kong with an affluent and rising market. During World War II, industries in European countries were seriously damaged and thus drastically decreased their exports to Asia. For daily necessities, they even had to acquire products from Hong Kong and thus stimulated Hong Kong's industrial development. But after the European industries recovered, their products occupied East Asian markets again and Hong Kong's industry quickly declined. In addition, from 1948 the United States opened up Japan's economy, which added salt to Hong Kong's struggling industry's wounds. Japan's products, which had a production cost 20-30% lower than that of Hong Kong's, were massively exported to Southeast Asia, taking over Hong Kong and its overseas markets (S. Liu). However, the United States' involvement in other East Asia economies had a different effect on

Hong Kong. Taiwan, after being expelled from the United Nations in 1971, pursued more aggressive economic growth and became one of the Asian Four Tigers.[41] In the 1990s, it had the highest foreign reserve in the world. South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan all initially adopted protectionist policies and import substitute production. Later they went through industrialization and eventually, like Hong Kong, developed export-oriented economies. Amongst the Newly Industrializing Economies (NIEs), South Korea and Taiwan, the two key financiers of Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s, changed from being on the receiving end of foreign loans and subsidies to capital markets. As Lai and So describe, the economy of the NIEs changed from Americanization to Asianization. In strengthening the East Asia economies against the Communist bloc, the United States paradoxically enabled East Asian NIEs to be less dependent on it financially. The rise of China's market further facilitates inter-regional trade and regional autonomy and thus makes Asia even less dominated by the United States' economy.

Hong Kong, instead of ended up a devastated colony, paradoxically was enabled by Britain's pro-trade colonial policy, the Hong Kong government's conservative fiscal policy and pro-stability administration, the United States' effort in strengthening East Asia capitalist allies, and China's economic reform to get on a global economic track. The early economic formation of Hong Kong has provided the infrastructure for the Hong Kong film industry to be transnational and commercial since its inception. The infrastructure for Small and Medium Enterprises for industry in general has facilitated the film industry to transform swiftly from the studio system to independent production within a couple of decades when the occasion required it. In the 1950s, the Hong Kong economy's industrialization coincides with the Cathay studio and Shaw studio moving their production centers to Hong Kong. The 1970s economic diversification coincides with the rise of the New Wave generation who had Western film-school educations.

Power shifted from the integrated Shaw studio to Golden Harvest which contracted out its production with satellite companies. Run Run Shaw moved to the more insulated television market and continued his integrated studio production management style there. In the 1980s, when Hong Kong turned into a capital market for local entrepreneurs, Cinema City's rapid rise was attributed to support by a local theater chain Golden Princess as its major financier and the booming domestic market. As China's economic reforms deepened, a new economic nexus between China and Hong Kong intensified. Hong Kong-China co-production increased. Like the industrialized Western countries, Hong Kong benefited from China being its economic hinterland, providing land and labor. The Hong Kong film industry streamlined from studio production to independent production. In the 1990s, when the Hong Kong economy depended heavily on the service sector and Hong Kong became the financial and communication center of the region, Hong Kong cinema was spreading the fastest in the world market and the film industry was further streamlined. However, free trade did not set us free. With its small and open economy, Hong Kong remained vulnerable to international crisis. Hong Kong's petite and export-oriented film industry was overshadowed by competition and has declined since the mid-1990s. When the general economic environment became more locally driven and Chinese dominant, there was parallel development in Hong Kong's culture and society.

In the social dimension, Hong Kong's society was characterized by its mobile population, and accommodation of the oppositional ideological camps of the Rightist and Leftist, the Chinese and the Western, the capitalist and the communist. Hong Kong is a Chinese cosmopolitan city. It has been the nexus of overseas Chinese, a network society straddling the gap between the Chinese and the outside world since the 14th century. In the Ming dynasty (1366-1644), Hong Kong's neighboring Chinese provinces, like

Chiuchow and Canton, emerged as the cultural middlemen because of their multi-national networks of investment and trade. The Taiping Movement (1851-1864), the largest peasant rising in Chinese history, drove massive numbers of Chinese from the Mainland to Hong Kong for asylum. In the 19th century, at the peak of the "South and North stores" – the stores for transporting and trading goods between Northern and Southern China – Hong Kong served as the link between Mainland China and overseas Chinese. Hong Kong remained a Chinese society despite Britain's one and a half centuries of colonization. At the start, the British Empire administrated Hong Kong as a typical colonial apartheid society, with the mid-level area of Hong Kong Island reserved exclusively for European expatriate communities. While the Chinese population grew from a few thousand to over six million, the European expatriate community remained small, less than 2% of the total population throughout the colonial history of Hong Kong. Under the Peking Treaty signed between the Qing Dynasty and Britain in 1898, Chinese citizens could freely enter and leave Hong Kong. Hong Kong, with its population made up mainly of refugees and immigrants, was a migrant society, and not a settled one. Modern China went through foreign invasions, civil wars, riots, chaos and various man-made and natural disasters. Hong Kong served as China's revolving door, with constant massive migration of Chinese in and out of the city. Whenever there were emergencies in China people fled to Hong Kong, and then moved back to China when the situation calmed down, or fled further to Southeast Asia or Western countries for asylum or economic opportunities. Such a mobile population created an unsettled ambience. Back then there could hardly be a distinctive cultural identity for the "Hong Kong identity." In the 1950s, Communist China closed its doors and thus impeded migration on a massive scale. With the post-war baby boom in the 1960s, Hong Kong started to have a sizable local-born and relatively settled population. This local-born and educated generation had

no memory of China until China was re-opened gradually in the 1980s. In the 1990s, 60% of the population was local-born. Meanwhile in Taiwan, only 12% of the population was from Mainland China when the KMT retreated to the island in 1949 and the majority of the population was local born. The island has been under 50 years of Japanese rule and 50 years of KMT rule. For one hundred years, the majority of the population has had no memory of China other than the depiction of China in Japanese or KMT education materials and media. The Cultural Revolution in China (1966-1976) and the 1967 riot in Hong Kong drove waves of migration in and out of Hong Kong again, and deepened the Hong Kong immigrant population's fear of Communist China. In the 1970s the Hong Kong economy took off, in sharp contrast with its closed-door developing motherland. In the 1980s the deadlock in Sino-British talks over the future of Hong Kong, and then the violent crackdown of China's democratic movement in 1989 pushed political anxiety to its peak. There was a massive migration of the middle class out of Hong Kong. From 1990 to 1999 almost 10 % of the population migrated out of Hong Kong, and this group consisted mostly of well-educated professional and middle class people (Skeldon; Lam and Pak). This mobile population deepened the transnational character of Hong Kong culture. This transfer station of people, capital and goods has fostered an ambience of transience and pragmatism, generating a peculiar post-national social sentiment, an ambivalent double allegiance to the city and the nation, an idiosyncratic non-territorial based "cultural nationalism" which is an identification with the Chinese civilization, but not necessarily with the ruling regime. While enjoying the material comforts in a colonial city and feeling ambivalence towards its motherland, Hong Kong was caught between British colonialism and Chinese nationalism, an in-between sentiment many Chinese of the Diaspora can relate to. In political limbo under a soft authoritarianism experiencing rapid economic growth, Hong Kong society has generated a cultural sensibility to which

people in Newly Industrializing Economies in Asia can relate. This affective dimension of Hong Kong history, not documented in Chinese or English language in any official history, has instead been recorded in sight and sound within Hong Kong movies.

A FLEXIBLE CINEMA

Situated in a precarious city, Hong Kong cinema has been crisis ridden and the history of Hong Kong cinema was characterized by interruptions. There was the rapid rise and fall of film companies, speedy rise and fall of power blocs, and the swift change of trends. Hong Kong cinema has suffered from political pressure, economic crisis, and intermittent shutdowns of the entire industry. To adapt to its volatile milieu, it has changed its outlook, language, source of funding, target markets, mode of production and even the entire industry's market structure. What remains unchanging is that it is always commercial, transnational and entertainment-oriented and it has nurtured generations of commercial filmmakers who thrived in chaos. Within a five-hour flight from Hong Kong where half of the world's population resides, there are more than a dozen forms of polities and a few dozen languages, in contrast to the U.S. unity of language and political system under one nation. Nevertheless, Hong Kong was relatively stable – enough for film production, especially when compared with its neighboring Asian countries, which have gone through multiple foreign invasions, colonization, civil wars, or even the splitting of the country into antagonistic halves in the last couple of centuries. Some underwent various changes in government, ranging from monarchy, dictatorship, and republic to authoritarian. In the name of de-colonization, nationalization or liberation, these ruling regimes would have one official language replacing another, and impose strict and debilitative cultural policies, or even rewrite the country's history to fortify its legitimacy. People have been denied freedom of expression to speak out about their painful colonial past, oppressive present authoritarian governments or disturbing foreign

interference. Their cinemas have withered under the state's tight control or declined in the face of foreign domination. Hong Kong's film industry has witnessed British colonization, KMT's language unification policy, Japanese occupation, the impact of Communist China's Cultural Revolution, and Hollywood's domination of the Pacific region in post-war years. Hong Kong, despite its location in turbulent Asia and its status as a colony, has enjoyed a relatively stable society and autonomous culture. The Hong Kong film industry has managed to survive crisis by being flexible, adaptive and maintaining both a precarious balance and constant renewal. In the political dimension, Hong Kong cinema is like a Laputa, receiving no ideological guidance from the state, or at times being tied with political or financial power blocs which were more short-lived than the film industry itself. In terms of industrial structure, it is an amoeba, swiftly transforming from studio monopoly to independent production free market competition in the space of a couple of decades. In the cultural dimension, it has been like a chameleon, changing its outlook, language, genre, theme and style according to its sources of financing and its target markets.

Hong Kong cinema has been characterized by its precarious balance between various forces and thus created a moderate ambience. As an entertainment industry in a colonial Southern city labeled as "cultural desert" considered beyond redemption, Hong Kong's commercial filmmakers had no ideological baggage or reason to raise the mass's consciousness or legitimize the ruling regime. Under the colonial government's pro-stability and trade-oriented administration, no radical political views or forces were tolerated, and political censorship was established to ensure of such absolute political neutrality. Radical filmmakers, whether from the Left or the Right were expelled. Political films were banned according to the censorship regulations when a film was deemed "prejudicial to good relations" with other countries. A film could be banned even

before its public release, a practice in opposition to democratic principle. The Hong Kong film industry never grew important enough to be enlisted as a government propaganda tool or perceived as a threat to the ruling regime. No studio ever grew big enough to impede change in market structure. The biggest one, the Shaw studio, gradually gave way to independent production in the 1980s. No organization was strong enough to unify local filmmakers for a war effort. The Japanese, despite their military might, failed to organize Hong Kong filmmakers to make a propaganda films. No social force was strong enough to "clean up" the entertainment industry. The pro-leftist Southern Chinese filmmakers, despite their enthusiasm, failed to continue their co-op filmmaking as their productions were not cost-effective and competitive enough to sustain their survival in the free market. The domestic market of Hong Kong cinema was not big and lucrative enough for Hollywood conglomerates to take more aggressive moves to monopolize the distribution and exhibition sectors. In Hong Kong cinema, there was neither extreme political stance nor big money and power.

The development of Hong Kong cinema has been disruptive in character and sporadic in nature. Zhou and Li, coming from China, divide the history of Hong Kong cinema into three major periods along a political timeline.[42] They assume that Chinese politics was the central factor in determining the course of development of the Hong Kong film industry, which in fact, in contrast to the insulated Chinese film industry, was responsive to multiple international influences and multifaceted social and cultural factors. Zhou and Li's periodization overlooks the cyclical, meandering and erratic pattern of Hong Kong cinema's development. Chung Po-yin's effort to summarize and tidy up this disarray of incidents into a coherent narrative assumes the integrated studio system as the norm, and eternity and independent production as the interim and disruption (*One Hundred Years*). Hong Kong cinema did not follow the development

path of Hollywood or Chinese national cinema. I would prefer to present a rough chronological account here to show how volatile the environment was and how responsive Hong Kong film industry was to these changes. There is a strong sense of the random fate of life in this industry.

The motion picture, like other Western novelties, was introduced to Hong Kong very early on (circa 1896). Movie theaters were soon built for regular screening. By 1920s, theater chains were formed all over major Chinese coastal cities with Lu Gen and Lo Ming-yau (Luo Mingyou) dubbed "King of the South China theater chain" and "King of the North China theater chain" respectively. After World War I, the supply of European productions reduced drastically. Hollywood majors' binding long-term contracts, as well as the block booking and blind selling practices made it risky and unprofitable for Hong Kong theater owners. Lu Gen turned to Shanghai productions for a more favorable deal. The practice at that time was that the theater owners only had to pay the royalty fee to the Shanghai producers, and all box office income went to the theater owners. The theater owners did not have to share profits with the producers/distributors. In 1933, Lu Gen and Lo Ming-yau attempted to merge their giant theater chains in a challenge against the Hollywood majors' trust. The attempt failed but Lo Ming-yau went on to build the most powerful film studio in Asia, Lianhua, in 1932 with support from and involvement of Hong Kong's and China's most powerful business moguls, politicians, the triad, and overseas Chinese businessmen, etc. As Chung Po-yin describes, this integration of political and economic authorities and incorporation of the Northern and Southern China power blocs, is unprecedented in Chinese film history (Endnote). However, Lianhua was soon divided between the Leftists and the Rightists like the country was, and was officially disintegrated in 1936. By 1930s, the Hollywood studio

system and the star system were adopted in Shanghai, but it was impossible to sustain an integrated studio without an integrated country.

In the 1920s, eighty years before *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, 2000) was shown in the West, martial arts movies with special effects were very popular in Shanghai and Hong Kong. The most notable one was *Torching the Red Lotus Temple* which has a total of eighteen episodes. It incorporated an early technology to show magical light and force emanating from swords, or palm thunder, or martial artists jumping on a wall or flying in the air. But in 1931, at the peak of its popularity, the Film Inspection Committee of the KMT Government banned it for its "superstitious content" and ended the making of martial arts films in Mainland China. Later the Japanese occupation and the civil war led a number of filmmakers of these martial arts movies, such as Wang Yuanlong, Hong Zhonghao, Ren Pengnian, Wu Lizhu, Lu Jiping to migrate to Hong Kong, so the genre lived on and was revived in the early 1960s in Cantonese martial arts films.

In the 1930s, sound films were popular. Shanghai and Hong Kong became the production centers of Mandarin and Cantonese films respectively. Luo Mingyou sent Moon Kwan to form the Da Guan film company in the United States. The first Cantonese film was financed, and targeted Cantonese in Guangzhou and overseas Chinese Cantonese in Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, Malaysia and North America, relying on their big consumption power for its profit. At the same time the Shaw family's Tian Yi studio, seeing a similar lucrative opportunity, also moved to Hong Kong to target Cantonese-speaking Chinese in Southeast Asia. As early as 1910, China's ruling party, the KMT carried on the "language unification movement." Mandarin was chosen as the national language and dialect was banned in textbooks and as a language of instruction in schools. The Hong Kong film industry took off after the introduction of sound. In 1936,

the KMT government announced the banning of Cantonese film production. Even though Hong Kong was a British colony not under China's jurisdiction, the Cantonese market in China was too big for Hong Kong producers to lose. The filmmakers sent multiple petitions, and the ban was suspended for three years. According to Zhou and Li, the banning of Cantonese film production involved the plan of the Shanghai producers to seize the lucrative South China market. Interestingly, as Chung Po-yin describes, the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937 reversed the fate of Cantonese cinema. With the KMT government banning Cantonese film production in China, Hong Kong became the asylum for Cantonese film production. And, because the KMT's Nanking Government was occupied with its anti-Japanese and anti-Communist propaganda film productions, it loosened its grip on Cantonese cinema. The Hong Kong film industry benefited from the southbound Shanghai filmmakers with an increased number of film companies and film productions. The China market was shut down. Cantonese films were more exportable than Mandarin films to overseas markets in Southeast Asia since the early generation overseas Chinese came mostly from the South China coastal area.

In the 1940s, the film industries in Taiwan and China were seized and centralized by the Japanese military as propaganda tool for the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. When the Japanese invaded Hong Kong, the British surrendered the city. The Japanese deemed Hong Kong "strategically vital for the defense of the Greater East Asiatic Sphere" (Tsang *Modern History* 126). The underlying principle of Japan's occupation policy in Hong Kong was that "Hong Kong's first and foremost function was to support the Japanese war effort." Despite the threat of violence, and the lure of food rations, wealth and power, Hong Kong filmmakers changed jobs[43] or fled. As they are usually described, Hong Kong filmmakers were like a sheet of loose sand, difficult if not impossible to unify.[44] The Japanese official responsible for organizing the Hong Kong

filmmakers was arrested and sent back to Japan. The Japanese military finally made one film, but with an all-Japanese cast and crew and a 17-year-old Hong Kong actress playing a side character who later also fled. Nevertheless, after the war this Cantonese actress was labeled a traitor for being in a Japanese film. The film was shown with little audience attendance. During the Japanese occupation, the Hong Kong film industry did not make one film. Zhou and Li attribute Hong Kong filmmakers' successful escape to Hong Kong's geographical location, with well-extended sea and land routes, whereas Shanghai filmmakers were trapped with no exit. Besides, to reduce the population burden, the Japanese military forced a large number of people to return to their South China hometowns. Hong Kong filmmakers escaped inland by mixing in the repatriated crowd. In Zhou and Li's account, there is some interesting detail that is worth mentioning. Canton Bay was French colony. It was divided into two districts. One was in fact under the domination of the local triads, against which the French could not intervene. Hong Kong filmmakers stayed on this side, while the Japanese official pursuing them could only stay at the other side. The Japanese official could not even lure the filmmakers to cross over to the other side to talk. While the Chinese government and the French could not mediate, the triad indirectly protected Hong Kong filmmakers from the Japanese military. After the war, there was almost a chance of Hong Kong returning to a Chinese government. Hong Kong lay inside the Allied powers' China theater[45] and Hong Kong was supposed to return to Generalissimo Chang Kai-shek's Chinese government. But, as Tsang reports, in the scramble for the liberation of Hong Kong, Chang's hands were full with his struggle with the Communists in China proper. Besides, a confrontation with Britain might jeopardize his relationship with the United States, and therefore Hong Kong went back to British rule. Had Hong Kong returned to the KMT's rule, there might

have been no more Cantonese cinema and no more "superstitious" martial arts films with special effects.

After the war, Hong Kong filmmakers returned and the Hong Kong film industry bounced back. In Taiwan and China the media industries were tightly tied to the state. In Taiwan, the post-war film industry was firmly in the grip of the party, the state and the military to promote nationalism and the legitimacy of the KMT's rule in Taiwan. In China, filmmakers who worked for the Japanese-occupied studio were indicted for collaboration. Many fled to Hong Kong, bringing with them valuable talents, capital, machines, know-how, connections and entrepreneurial experience. They continued the tradition of the Shanghai filmmaker southbound migration. The Hong Kong Cantonese cinema used to be a small-scale cottage industry production. The exodus of Shanghai filmmakers and building of big studios changed the outlook of the Hong Kong film industry. The most prominent example is S. K. Chang (Zhang Shankun), who was then the leader of the Japanese occupied China United Film Company.[46] After fleeing to Hong Kong, he later built his studio in Hong Kong with close political ties to Taiwan.[47] In the 1950s, with co-production with Japan, he maintained his contact with Kawakita Nagamasa, then vice-president of the China United Film Company (Fu "Struggle"). While the Chinese film industry let go of its valuable filmmakers and connections with Japan and Taiwan cinema, Chang's Taiwan and Japanese connection was brought forward to other Hong Kong studios like Shaw, and later Golden Harvest. Taiwan and Japan remained as important markets for Hong Kong cinema well into the 1990s.

In the post-war years there was the parallel development of Mandarin cinema and Cantonese cinema. There were three major groups of Chinese filmmakers, and thus three modes of production. The first one was the Southbound Shanghai filmmakers, with their integrated studios and big-budget Mandarin film production. The second one was the

Cantonese cinema with their low budget quickies. The third one was the co-op production by the pro-Leftist South China Filmmakers organization. In 1949, this group declared a "Clean Up Cantonese Cinema Movement". Mainstream Cantonese films were criticized for their "rough and slipshod productions and feudal and superstitious content". The co-op's quality Cantonese films sold well for a while but gradually faded, since their production was not cost-effective and competitive enough in the market.

During the Cold War years, the United States launched a containment policy against communist countries in the Pacific. But in Taiwan, American's ally, both American and Japanese movies were seriously restricted. In South Korea, Japanese movies were restricted. But Hong Kong movies, until 1997, enjoyed the status and privilege as a national cinema with tax exemption in Taiwan's market due to the KMT government's anti-communist policy. In China, the market was closed and the film industry was centralized and modeled after that of the Soviet Union. Frequent political movements and purges interrupted production and impeded industrial transformation. At some point the film school and the industry were shut down, drastically reducing film production to a handful of model opera films during the Cultural Revolution. Film industries in China and Taiwan were firmly in the grip of the state and went through de-colonization and nationalization. There was a while when Hong Kong cinema became the battleground between the Leftist and pro-Rightist studios with ties to China and Taiwan, each respectively vying for ideological triumph in Hong Kong. These southbound Mandarin studios set their sights northwards. Their films were shot in Hong Kong, but dealt with issues on mainland China or an imagined Chinese culture with anti-feudalism or anti-capitalism themes. Some movies were adapted from May Fourth intellectual novels, and these émigré directors produced socially conscious entertainment films. But in this capitalist city, a haven for war-worn refugees, both eventually lost out to the

outright commercial film companies in the box offices. During this period Hong Kong was the only place in the world free to churn out Chinese language commercial entertainment.

In the 1950s there were a few bigger Cantonese film companies. But compared to their Mandarin cinema counterparts, they were short in capital, theater chains and staff support. The post-war years saw the rapid rise and fall of Cantonese cinema. With the China market closed, Hong Kong Cantonese cinema targeted Southeast Asia with the rise of the overseas Chinese communities there. Independent production with cash-oriented financing from distributors in Southeast Asia was common. The most popular genre was martial arts and the most notable series was *Wong Fei Hung* (directed mostly by Hu Pang and starring Kwan Tak Hing) with more than one hundred sequels and spin offs made since 1949. These stories revolve around a regional folk hero of the named title with his ensemble cast. The demise of Cantonese cinema in the 1960s was attributed to its shoddy production: overproduction, over-booking for stars, shooting without a completed script, constant improvisation, etc. But it also had its unique challenge of the time: the establishment of free television broadcast in Cantonese in Hong Kong, and the rise of nationalist movements and anti-Chinese riots in Southeast Asia which reduced Cantonese cinema's overseas market.

The 1950s and 1960s were the golden times of Hong Kong Mandarin cinema. The duopoly – the Cathay studios and the Shaw studios – were aggressive in opening the Taiwan and Japan markets. Instead of colluding with each other like Hollywood majors, Cathay and Shaw engaged in vicious competition to the point of making the same stories released at the same time. In the midd-1960s, after the demise of Cathay studio due to its owner's accidental death, Shaw studio became the only dominant studio in Hong Kong. With its integrated studio and modern facilities, the Shaw studio was regarded as the

symbol of the modern Asian film industry. However, it was managed like a traditional Chinese family business, with Run Run Shaw as the patriarch, and the center of creative control and power was the director, not the producer. Each major director had his regular cast and crew, and younger filmmakers had to wait for the older generation directors to retire or leave to get a chance to make their own movies. Nevertheless, the Shaw studio nurtured a big pool of talents like directors Chang Cheh, star Jimmy Wang Yu and action choreographer Yuen Woo Ping and Ching Siu Tung. Chang Cheh's protégé John Woo is a master of the action film himself. The "New Epoch of Wuxia" headed by King Hu reinvented the genre and elevated the genre to the realm of international art film and Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (2000) is an homage to King Hu's poetic martial arts film.

In 1970, production head Raymond Chow left Shaw studio and formed Golden Harvest. To reduce overhead, Golden Harvest contracted out its productions to satellite companies of filmmakers like Bruce Lee, Michael Hui, Jackie Chan, and Sammo Hung, etc. Golden Harvest provided the financing and distribution. And unlike Shaw studio, Golden Harvest accepted profit sharing with the filmmakers. It was aggressive in opening the world market and acquiring films from independent production. Bruce Lee's kung fu series was a hit in the world market, and the Michael Hui comedy series was a big hit in Japan.

In 1967 Television Broadcast (TVB) was established with Run Run Shaw as one of its founders. It replaced cable television and became the most popular family entertainment in Hong Kong. TVB gradually localized its production and recruited young people for its cast and crew, giving regular training classes. Later the cable TV was also changed to wireless, and together with the short-lived Commercial TV, these three television stations nurture the renowned Hong Kong New Wave generation. In TVB there

was the "film unit" in which the producer-director and his writers enjoyed their creative autonomy. Round table scriptwriting by committee was the practice that the New Wave directors carried on when they migrated to the film industry. The troupe system, i.e. the director worked with his regular crew across productions, was also continued in the film industry. The New Wave generation, mostly educated in British and American film schools, also introduced the "art director" position to Hong Kong film industry. In the past, this duty was taken up by the props master, or the directors had to do it themselves. These New Wave filmmakers, many with an overseas education, invigorated the ailing industry, but unlike the filmmakers of Taiwan New Cinema and China's Fifth Generation, they "flocked to the industry without prior shared intentions or plans, and with no uniform agenda and no consistent ideology" (Cheuk 235) They made no declaration to clean up the industry or challenge the older generation. They worked side by side with filmmakers of the previous generation or under the apprentice system. Like the way they worked in the television film industry, they collaborated with each other. More importantly, most of them were not resistant to commercial films. Ann Hui made "commercially viable political films" like her Vietnam trilogy (*The Boy From Vietnam*, 1978, *The Story of Woo Viet*, 1981 and *The Boat People*, 1982) and Tsui Hark made popular films, adopting genres and the star system. The New Wave directors were soon absorbed into the mainstream commercial cinema. The rise of independent productions opened up more opportunities for the young filmmakers.

As television production became more localized, Cantonese production in the film industry declined. In 1972, no Cantonese film was released in this Cantonese speaking city. However, within a few years, in 1980, Cantonese cinema bounced back and completely dominated the market.

Table 4.1: Rise and Fall of Mandarin and Cantonese Films

	Mandarin	Cantonese
1970	83	35
1971	85	1
1972	87	0
1973	93	1
1974	80	21
1975	69	28
1976	59	36
1977	42	45
1978	24	75
1979	23	86
1980	0	105

In 1980, Run Run Shaw became chair of TVB, and production in Shaw's film studio declined. The film market of the 1980s was dominated by the tripartite: Golden Harvest, Cinema City and D & B. The rapid rise and fall of Cinema City is worth studying since it had a powerful impact on the entire industry despite its brief existence. It introduced the producer system and exerted greater administrative control over the creative process. It invented the renowned 9-reeler formulaic script writing: the efficient committee writing process to ensure the frequency and even distribution of gags and visual spectacles in their standard 90 minute films, to keep the audience engaged throughout the film. It emphasized modern marketing and packaging, and the glossy appearance of their films. It implemented its export strategy by localizing a foreign film and paid attention to the cross-cultural gap. For example, in one of their films exported to

Taiwan: in the Hong Kong version the comic character speaks Cantonese with Chiuchow accent, but in the Taiwan version, to achieve the same comic effect, they have the character speaking Mandarin with Shangdong accent.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, China gradually opened its doors and launched its economic reforms. In the 1980s, when the costs of Hong Kong film production skyrocketed, low cost labor and scenic landscapes were supplied by China for co-production. The Southeast Asia market further contracted, and Hong Kong filmmakers faced the harsh realty: find new international outlets or fold. As Hong Kong cinema became more widely spread around the world, the industry and its productions were further streamlined out of necessity. Bureaucracy, paper work and other time consuming practices were further reduced or eliminated.

ADAPTIVE

The development of Hong Kong cinema was not linear and planned. In response to external changes, Hong Kong cinema switched between Mandarin and Cantonese; between studio system and independent production. Its target markets moved from Guangzhou, China, to overseas Chinese communities, to East Asian countries. The film industry did not grow logically from small to big. In the 1990s, the Hong Kong film industry integrated a bit of everything from its history to help it survive a volatile global age. It inherited the talent pool from the Shaw studio and television. It adopted the Cantonese cinema's troupe system and cash-oriented financing. It took advantage of Golden Harvest's connections in Taiwan and Japan. It incorporated Cinema City's market calculations and fast-paced comic action style. In the 1990s, the 1960s Cantonese cinema's cottage industry's mode of production with its prepaid cash financing, troupe organization pattern, and anarchic filmmaking practices were replicated and the *Wong Fei Hung* series was remade by Tsui Hark into his popular *Once Upon A Time In China*

series. The 1990s was like a deja-vu of the 1960s Cantonese cinema. Interestingly, the factors attributed to the demise of Cantonese cinema in the 1960s were also repeated in the 1990s. Is Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s a regression to the 1960s cottage industry operation, and thus a dysfunctional maladjustment?

Chapter 5: A Legless Bird in a Burning Jungle

Hong Kong in the 1990s is defined by the sovereignty change, a decade bracketed by the traumatic June Fourth Incident in 1989, and Hong Kong's return to control by China in 1997. Political anxiety was at its peak and the 1997 issue defined every aspect of life. During the last stage of transition, Hong Kong was in limbo and the colonial government was reduced to lame duck status. Uncertainty of the future induced international corporations to move their headquarters overseas and inflamed a massive outmigration of the middle class, the backbone of Hong Kong's economy. Hong Kong's small and open economy, at the mercy of unfettered global capitalism, suffered intense fluctuations due to international and speculative economic activities. Local economic growth, mainly driven by the real estate and stock markets, was in the hands of a few land barons. The widening of the gap between the rich and the poor in this colony, without the safety net of social security, further fueled social unrest. Life in this decade was a Darwinian survival of the fittest in a burning capitalist jungle at the fin-de- siècle. Interestingly, "stability and prosperity" was the official description of reality of Hong Kong. This southern colonial city, once labeled a "cultural desert" became a cultural swan, with its popular cultural products dominating the region and epitomized by the slogan "Hong Kong Wonder Never Ceases", a myth embraced by those who believe in its magical makeover by global capitalism. During this decade, when Hong Kong's movies spread the most and became recognized around the world, the film industry switched to a cottage industry operation, comprised of independent productions known for their

filmmakers' frantic work style. There was absence of the integrated studio or any clear division of labor; the mode of financing was switched back to the *pianhua* system – a cash-based pre-sale financing of films; directors routinely started shooting without completed scripts, and improvisation on the set was the norm. It looked more like guerilla filmmaking than a modern movie business. In the previous era the integrated Shaw studio was regarded as a symbol of the modern film industry in Asia. The 1980s were deemed a golden age by industry insiders when thinking in terms of financial profit. But in the 1990s, when Hong Kong cinema looked good on the outside, the film industry was already in a dire situation and was pronounced dead by the local media. In the new millennium, production dropped to only a few dozen films per year, and Hollywood features dominated more than half of the local market share, unprecedented in the history of Hong Kong cinema. Was the operation of Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s a regression to the shoddy filmmaking practices of the past, and an inability to move forward? Was it a dysfunctional maladjustment?

Hong Kong cinema, even though situated in a small colonial city with no control over its external environment, survived the harsh conditions in the past by maintaining a precarious balance amongst various forces, undergoing constant renewal and being adaptive to its peculiar environment. To help make it over the very rugged path of the 1990s, the Hong Kong film industry switched to a survival mode and further streamlined its operations. It seemed to go back to the mode of a cottage industry with the tripartite of the 1980s being replaced by numerous passing independent production houses, and the filmmakers' new frantic filmmaking style. The Hong Kong film industry's extreme

flexibility was a response to extreme uncertainty. Since the Hong Kong film industry was de-integrated and had no control over its reception end – the distribution sector and the overseas markets, flexibility was emphasized in the supply arrangements – the production sector. In his analysis of the economics of contemporary Hollywood, De Vany concludes that its change to a more flexible mode of operation was shaped by uncertainties and that also applied to Hong Kong cinema, "The crucial factor is just this: nobody knows what makes a hit or when it will happen. When one starts to roll, everything must be geared to adapt successfully to the opportunities it presents."(Z. Shan; de Vany 28) Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s was like Cantonese cinema in the 1960s: besides the "Seven Day Wonder" quickies, sequels, series and copycats were strategies to cash in on and replicate success. Proven stars were overbooked, until the overexposed star lost popularity and was no longer wanted by the market. Bureaucracy, paperwork, executive meetings to green light projects and "development hell" procedures were minimized or avoided. However, the Hong Kong film industry in the 1990s was not a simple regression or replication of the 1960s. It did make various improvements and made intelligent progress: filmmakers capitalized on and integrated Hong Kong's positive image as a modern liberal city in their narrative films, productions were star and genre driven, and the Classical Hollywood narrative style was appropriated to widen Hong Kong's popular movies' accessibility to non-Asian audiences. The European modernist aesthetic was espoused to appeal to Asian and Western niche markets, the domestic exhibition sector was remodeled, and filmmakers adopted more effective and diplomatic ways to battle censorship. Also, the roles of the writer and producer were adjusted to adapt to the

particular organizational structure of the Hong Kong film industry and Hong Kong Chinese culture. However, while being efficient and flexible, the film industry became streamlined to the point of crippling itself like a legless bird. It unloaded its excessive baggage, and was light enough to get through the burning jungle, but it did not have legs to rest and catch its breath for the future journey. For example, there was no research and development, no or little retention of copyright of the movies made by Hong Kong filmmakers, or any building of a film library for better bargaining power. There was no long-term planning for the future or any grooming of a new generation of talents. Like the ominous bamboo blossoming, immediately after the bang in the 1990s, Hong Kong cinema deteriorated, and suffered a serious shortage of new cast and crew needed to sustain the boom or to replenish the talent pool. In sum, what was perceived as maladaptive is in fact a desperate adaptive survival strategy of a cinema, situated in a colony in a volatile region, during a chaotic time. Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s is like a legless bird trying to make it through the burning jungle. Those outside the jungle were impressed by how high it flew, but those inside knew how hard it was just to survive.

A BURNING JUNGLE

Hong Kong in the 1990s was a city with a strange identity and an intriguing story to tell. During the transitional period, Hong Kong was a political limbo. The only certainty about the sovereignty change was it would not bring either autonomy or democracy. The colony's governmental features would be continued and Hong Kong's people were excluded from the Sino-British talks over the future of Hong Kong just as they were since the early colonial years. It was odd that despite its insistence on territorial

integrity and national dignity, China had allowed this city be kept as a Western power's colony all the way to the end of the 20th century. China was admitted to the United Nations in 1971 and demanded that the UN clarify Hong Kong's political status as "a Chinese territory under British administration". In 1972, the UN General Assembly removed Hong Kong and Macau from its list of colonial territories, and Hong Kong changed from a Crown Colony to a Dependent Territory. Interestingly, in 1974 China declined Portugal's offer to return Macau but in 1997 China did not decline the return of Hong Kong by Britain. Instead the event was celebrated by the Chinese media as the ending of a national humiliation, "a huge diplomatic, national, and psychological victory over the unequal treaties imposed by the Western powers in the mid-1800s." (Carroll 207) And, despite its anti-imperialism stance, China would retain Hong Kong's colonial governmental features. For example, the SAR government retained the advisory system, a device created by the colonial administration to build a consensus government after its legitimacy was seriously challenged. But the government was still biased towards an elite and was not accountable to the people. The last governor, Chris Patten, attempted to introduce political reforms and infuriated the Chinese government. The Sino-British talks came to a halt and the Chinese government retaliated by forming their own shadow committee and advisory bodies. The antagonism and limited cooperation between the British and the Chinese governments caused a severe confidence crisis in Hong Kong. The authority of the colonial government was undermined. In the international arena, the Hong Kong government was toothless. In the domestic realm, it was a lame duck. The professionals, the well educated, and the middle class voted with their feet. This decade

was characterized by mass demonstrations and a panic-driven massive outmigration. In June, 1989, eight years before Hong Kong's return to China, 1.5 million people – a quarter of the local population - marched in the streets to protest against the crackdown against the democratic movement in Beijing. On July 1, 2003, six years after the handover, half a million people marched to demonstrate against the imbecilic administrators of the Hong Kong SAR government. In this decade alone, 600,000 people i.e. 10% of the population – mostly professional and middle class, and the cream of Hong Kong society, emigrated out, indicating their lack of confidence of the future of the city (Skeldon). The prevalence of surveys on Hong Kong identity, by academia and the media, was symptomatic of the allegiance and identity crisis of the Hong Kong people. Answers to survey identity questions varied from "I am a Hongkongese," to "I am a Chinese," to "I am a Hong Kong Chinese." The most commonly used answer "I am Chinese, but I'm from Hong Kong" (C. K. Lau) indicates people's double allegiance. The "but" in their answers speaks of their ambivalence towards the motherland. People identified with Chinese culture, but not necessarily with the state. Hong Kong was ruled by Britain with a soft approach but was not let go. It became part of China but was allowed to continue with a high degree of self-government. As ethnically Chinese, the SAR government has the legitimacy that the alien colonial government lacked, but it didn't build the consensus that the former colonial office was excellent at doing. As the test subject of the political experiment "one country two systems" in which the British and Chinese governments cooperated unwillingly, Hong Kong was dealing with an insurmountable political anxiety.

The Hong Kong economy was always characterized by a concentration of power and wealth since the early colonial years. Throughout its history it was not really laissez-faire. Instead, non-market forces played a key role in steering its development. Situated in a British colony, Hong Kong's economy started with the British monopolized the major sectors like finance, transportation, public utilities and trading, etc. and the role of the administration was to protect the interest of the trade-finance complex. Since the 1950s Hong Kong had China serving as its economic hinterland, supplying low price foodstuffs, cheap labor and materials. During the 1970s, the British hongs were gradually acquired by Chinese business corporations. With entrepôt trade defined as the raison d'être of Hong Kong, the British merchants left the entire manufacturing sector to the Chinese, who later accumulated capital and ventured out into the real estate sector. The British hongs, due to the uncertainty of any British long- term commitment to this city, made blunders in their business strategies in the manufacturing sector, real estate sector and stock market, and gradually lost out to the Chinese. Hong Kong's economy instantly bounced back after the shock in 1989 and China quickened the pace of economic reforms. China's leader Deng Xiaoping's 1992 Southern Tour with his famous remark "China could do with a few more Hong Kongs" helped boost Hong Kong's economy. However, Hong Kong's economic prosperity was not due to being a neo-

classical utopia of fair market competition, even though the power had shifted from the British to the Chinese. In the 1990s, the stock market remained the major arena of business arena and the property market became the driving force of economic growth. Both were open to international competition. The players and the playing fields became more international, but the game remained the same. In the global age, Hong Kong's economy remained characterized by corporate feudalism and the life for ordinary citizens remained harsh.

Hong Kong was routinely ranked as one of the most expensive cities in the world before the coining of the term "Nylonkong"[48] to recognizing Hong Kong as one of the tripartite financial centers of the world. During the transition period, high property prices were caused by the British and Chinese governments' deliberate policy to restrict land supply. In the 1990s, real estate was the actual largest sector in Hong Kong's economy. As Jean Jaulin and Jean-Francois Huchet point out, Hong Kong's economic growth was mainly driven by real estate, the stock market and collateral sectors, rather than by trade and finance as is popularly believed. Real estate is reckoned to have largely dominated the Hong Kong stock market with 60% of stock capitalization. Hong Kong never had a free market in land because as a colony all land in Hong Kong was Crown Land. Revenue from land and property has always been the most important contributing element in Hong Kong's government non-tax revenues, which averaged over 34% of total government revenues from 1949/50 to 1975/76. As Jonathan R. Schiffer points out,

this proportion is among the highest in the world (Schiffer 208). The outrageous rise of land prices in the 1990s was a result of a deliberate policy. In 1984, China and Britain signed the Joint Declaration setting a ceiling on land sales of 50 hectares a year from 1985. The economy and population grew rapidly (there were 150 emigrants from China daily and also demand from foreign companies; 200,000 more people per year in the territory, which was an increase to 2 to 3 %) (Schiffer 264). This artificially induced land scarcity pushed up property values and prices. Linda Y.C. Lim presents figures to show how expensive cost of living in Hong Kong was, "Land costs typically amount to 70% of the total cost of building in Hong Kong, the inverse of the relationship in most markets" (275) From 1984 to 1997, prices of residential property rose 14 times. Between 1987 and 1997, office rents soared by 300 to 400%! This "helped make Hong Kong, in the space of ten years, into the most expensive city in the world after Tokyo." (261) The average shop rents in Hong Kong were 41% higher than in the most expensive areas of New York. Some hotels demanded from their retail tenants prices close to double what is charged in London or Tokyo. "The cost of real estate has been added to the price of goods, making Hong Kong one of the most expensive shopping centers in the world." (265) High property prices were the main reason that Hong Kong was routinely ranked as the most expensive city in the world in terms of cost of living.

The primary beneficiaries of this bullish property market were the government, private developers and households with high savings capacity as Jaulin and Huchet have determined. The government derived an average of almost 30% of its tax revenue from property and land (264). The private developers benefited the most. As Xu Baoqiang

quotes from various sources, from 1976 to 1980 the net profit growth of the five dominant real estate companies was a multiplier of 2 to 10 times (B. Xu). In early 1980s, the average profit margin was 10-30%. The return rate on property investment in Hong Kong was 10%, more than double that of major cities in the world. Around 1997, the sales profit for developers generally was over 30%. In 1996, the property sector was dominated by only 7 companies: Cheung Kong, Sun Hung Kai, Henderson, Sino Land, Swire, Wheelock & Co., and New World. The Hong Kong Stock Exchange, the world's fifth largest exchange, was disproportionately populated by publicly listed property development firms, and by banks and financial institutions heavily exposed to the property sector, to which almost one-half of all bank loans go. As Xu points out, the property market of Hong Kong was "international". "International" here included China. And Lim points out that many Chinese SOEs (state-owned enterprises) with strong political ties heavily invested in the Hong Kong property market. Before Hong Kong's return to China, it was estimated that 40% of capital investment was from China (B. Xu). In the 1990s, the world's richest Chinese mostly were either industrialists or retailers turned property-tycoons. Xu also points out that the property market in Hong Kong was very speculative. The prices continued to rise way above the local end user's buying power. The land barons and local elite (included stock-broking, banking, law and other cartelized professions) stayed at the top of this fast growing market and wage earners stayed at the bottom.

Housing has continued to be a problem for residents of this city. In this Chinese society with no pension system, an apartment purchase became the investment most highly prized as a financial product for the future. However, as Xu has determined, the price of property grew much faster than wage earners could catch up. From 1970 to mid-1980s, the property prices rose, on average, 15.5% annually. Average worker wages rose

by only 11.9%. But from 1984 to early 1993, the increase in property price was double that of the increase in average income. From 1994-5, the prices decreased by 20-30%. But in two years time, it increased by doubling again. It was estimated that in 1993, a tiny apartment of 400 square feet (which is about the size of a garage in the United States, and in Hong Kong usually housed a family of at least 3 to 4 people) in the urban area equals a college graduate's 15 years of income. In 1995, an average family had to spend three quarters of the total household income to service a housing mortgage. The inflation rate in the 1980 to mid-1990s was at a record high. In 1980 the inflation rate was 4.444. In 1981, it jumped to 9.479. In 1982, it reached double digits: 10.948. From 1989 to 1991, it stayed at double digits. It was only after the financial crisis and the SARS crisis that the inflation rate started to go down and even to have a negative rate in 1999.[49] For the "shell-less snail" the majority of average wage earners living without owning a home and fighting a double-digit inflation rate, life in Hong Kong in this era was like the survival of the fittest in a burning capitalist jungle.

In East Asia, Japan and Taiwan, the key markets of Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s, shared a similar experience. Hong Kong's property market was characterized by being speculative and international. It was closely linked to the cycle of the international economy. Since the 1970s, especially after the 1980s, economic growth everywhere in the world slowed down except in East Asia.[50] Xu continues to point out that international unemployed capital and hot money flowed into East Asia property markets for a high and quick return. In Japan, in 1991, land prices reached 20 billion US dollars, which was equal to five times that of the US's total land value. From 1986 to 1988, in two years time, property values increased by 2.8 billion dollars, which was the amount of Japan's annual GNP. In Taipei, Taiwan, the price of a residence rose by a multiple of

2.5 times from 1987 to 1989 and led to the "Shell-less Snail" circumstance. In Chinese society, not owning a home is considered very unsettling, especially for the older generation who have experienced war time destitution and constantly look for a place they can call home in their old age. As times went on, the gap between the rich and the poor widened. In the 1996 Hong Kong by-census, the Gini coefficient, which measures the disparity of income distribution, was at 0.518. It was one of the highest among the developed countries as pointed out by Jaulin and Huchet (0.35 for countries with relatively egalitarian redistribution. "0" indicates equality. "1" means complete disparity). In 1986, it was 0.453. In 1991, it increased to 0.476 and continued to climb.[51] Besides that, as C.K. Lau adds, the distribution of household income in 1996 showed that the top 10% of Hong Kong households earned as much as 41.8% of Hong Kong's aggregate income, compared with 37.3% in 1991. And this sector of the society was the only one, which saw any growth in its earnings share (73).

With inordinate dependence on the property market, Hong Kong economy was extremely interest-sensitive. It was vulnerable to changes in political climate and international speculators' attacks. Some scholars have pointed out the structural flaws of Hong Kong economy (Jaulin and Huchet; Lim; B. Xu; K.-y. Law). With a completely unprotected open economy, Hong Kong was slower than other East Asian countries to recover from the Asian financial crisis in 1997. In the 1990s, the soaring property and stock markets were mistakenly perceived as manifestations of a healthy competitive market. Speculators' gambling-style economic activity was conflated with frantic market competition. There was no real industry upgrade in Hong Kong. Factories moved north

to exploit cheap labor and resources, but technology was not upgraded and workers were not retrained. The population was aging and there was no specialization in Hong Kong, as was happening in other developed countries when relocating production overseas. Beneath the hustle and bustle of a busy city was a puddle of stagnant economy. Like a neon light shining on a puddle, the flashing colorful glitter on the surface masked the lifelessness underneath. To the outside world, with its skyscrapers, fashion, international cuisine, and hi-tech electronic gadgets, Hong Kong had all the trappings of a modern cosmopolitan city. It seemed to have transformed into a beautiful swan in the eyes of its Western capitalist beholders.

Socially Hong Kong was also anachronistic. Despite its cosmopolitan outlook, Hong Kong's society was feudalistic and littered with urban problems. Colonization by a civilized Western country didn't redeem this Chinese society from its feudal practices. The inheritance law dating from the Qing dynasty, which denied women of indigenous communities the right to inherit family property, was not canceled until as late as 1994, three years before the handover when Hong Kong was under the gaze of the international media (Loh). Despite the passing of the first ordinance by the Legislative Council of Hong Kong in 1844, prohibiting the practice of slavery in Hong Kong, the *mui tsai* system (female bondservants), and the buying and selling of human beings, was still tolerated and legal as late as the 1930s, after almost one hundred years of administration under British rule (Chin). In Britain, certain types of homosexual behavior were decriminalized in 1967 ("Gay Rights"), but in Hong Kong these were decriminalized as late as 1990, three decades after Britain. Housing policies only

provided for conventional families, and the system was flawed by gender inequality (K. W. Chan). The price of private housing was prohibitive for average wage earners, who must then look for alternative arrangements. Hong Kong was presented as a liberal city. The smooth running of business and commerce has been attributed to the maintenance of law and order by British legal system, but as we shall see later, the colonial government broke international law in regulating film exhibition for political reasons with no statutory basis. The censorship ordinances allowed the government to ban any film deemed "prejudicial to good relations with other territories". It was only in 1994, three years before the sovereignty change ceremony, that this political censorship clause was dropped. On the other hand, modernization also brought to Hong Kong the urban problems Western developed countries experienced such as a rising crime rate, juvenile delinquency, high suicide rates, teenage girl anorexia, as well as urban diseases such as mental disorders, heart disease and cancer. Hong Kong in the 1990s was in fact politically backward, economically stagnant and socially feudal. It retained a colonial government, its economic growth was lopsided, and unjust feudal practices were permitted. For those who didn't subscribe to the beauty standards of global capitalism, Hong Kong was still an ugly duckling, only larger, but on the screens of Hong Kong export-oriented entertainment films we only get to see the swan.

CITY BRANDING AND CINEMA

In Hong Kong there is a close link between city branding and this city's cinema. Michael Curtin's media capital theory points out the structural material precondition for a city to become a media capital. Koichi Iwabuchi's cultural odor theory points out the

relationship between a country's discursively constructed image and its export media products. To insert the cultural odor theory into the media capital theory, it means the city presents its positive desirable discursively constructed image in the world in order to be a media capital able to export its products. When it comes to power, perceptions are as important as actual power, and city branding is important in the global era. With tourism and trading as two of its major income sources, Hong Kong was a city abounding in fascinating stories. Hong Kong's transformation was legendary and the shift of the discourse of it was dramatic. The city was deemed undesirable in the past. In the history of the Chinese Celestial Empire, Hong Kong was a terra incognita located in the land of Southern Barbarians. In the 1830s, it was verbally dismissed by a British naval commander as merely "a barren rock." In the 1960s, it was still stereotyped as a "cultural desert," a term used by mainland Chinese intellectuals since the 1920s to describe Hong Kong's hybridized culture: "simultaneously Westernized, feudal, colonial, and provincial." (Fu "Between Nationalism" 247) But in the 1990s Hong Kong suddenly became such a desirable city that people began worrying about this "Pearl of the Orient" being devoured by Red China. Everything about it became positive and desirable: its capitalist system, its positive non-intervention policy, its peculiar colonial democracy, its laissez-faire economic policy, its vibrant popular culture and its cinema. Hong Kong's government was quick to capitalize on the city's new international image, and Hong Kong cinema's new fame in the world market even though it had never supported the film industry before. In 1996, a year before Hong Kong's handover, the Hong Kong Trade Development Council organized a tour to the United States to promote trade and

business, with award-winning actress Josephine Siao as the cultural ambassador, and the tour was titled "Hong Kong Wonder Never Ceases". "Wonder" was the way we narrated the story of Hong Kong to the outside world. In the United States, politicians have cited Hong Kong's economic policy as a model. Former consul general Richard A. Boucher in his 1997 speech titled "The Genius of Hong Kong", liberally uses words like "magic," "magnet," "efficient," and "successful" to describe Hong Kong's achievements[52] and the British even used "capitalist paradise" to tell the Hong Kong story – a barren rock before British arrival turned it into a capitalist paradise by their benevolent rule (Ngo). "Miracle" was often used to describe Hong Kong's rapid development and Hong Kong was seen as the leader of the Asian Four Tigers in the "East Asian Miracle," and widely endorsed as a development model even in international organizations like the World Bank (Ngo). As Ngo Tak-wing points out, what's so unique about Hong Kong is that colonial rule and economic development were seen as going hand in hand. Even Communist China's late leader Deng Xiaoping endorsed it and didn't seem to be disturbed by its colonial form of bureaucracy. He pronounced that China would build more special economic zones in China: development *a la* Hong Kong. Hong Kong graduated as an apt pupil of capitalism and became a master to be imitated. In the new narrative, Hong Kong became the paragon of Chinese modernity and it succeeded without colonizing its neighbors like Imperial Japan did, and without patronage from the United States like other East Asian countries did.

If all discourses are products of power, this shifting discourse of Hong Kong is a product of the shifting power dynamic in the world. In Chinese communities, the

hierarchy of China proper as the center, and overseas Chinese as marginal seemed to reverse. When the Chinese Celestial Empire called itself the Middle Kingdom of the world, lands along the Yellow River were regarded as the "origin" of Chinese civilization. In the Central Plain syndrome (Da Zhongyuan Xintai) the capital in the north was the political, economic and cultural center and thus Hong Kong was at the periphery of China's imagined geopolity. However, the arrival of Western imperialists from the sea moved the economic centers to coastal ports. Shanghai and Hong Kong became the two busiest ports. As Poshek Fu points out, Hong Kong was marginalized in the 20th century's representation of Chinese culture. In a centralizing, anti-imperialist, state-building discourse, Hong Kong culture was deemed impure, colonial, and politically apathetic. After the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese economy was devastated. The Chinese government started the Open Door policy and invited foreign investment, which logically came mostly from the more affluent overseas Chinese who have blood ties or emotional connections with China. The citizens of China avariciously consumed foreign cultural products, and as Tu Wei-Ming's article in the early 1990s claims, the periphery became the center (W.-M. Tu). Hong Kong, with the infrastructure of a free port running for more than one and half century, located at the southern tip of China, acted as China's gateway to the outside world and facilitated China's integration

into the world's trading system. Hong Kong's culture, a hybrid culture which used to be denigrated in the discourse of national culture and cultural authenticity, became a positive attribute to be embraced. Situated at the junction of two major network civilizations – the Anglo-sphere and Chopstick Culture – Hong Kong, in the age of China's ascendancy and an Anglosphere-dominated global era, occupied the most strategically important crossroads. As economic growth in the West began slowing down, Western-based transnational conglomerates pursued the world's largest and fastest growing markets, East Asia and especially China, which in the post-Socialist era, focused on economic growth and getting on the global track, instead of cultural purity or political fanaticism, as a goal for national pride. In the new global era, Hong Kong, once denigrated as the bastard resulting from Western imperialist assault, became the hybrid wonder child to be embraced.

The new international migration patterns, with the expansion of Asian activities around the globe, also complicated the old dichotomous Western-centric core-periphery hierarchy. As pointed out by Ronald Skeldon, the migration out of Hong Kong "is part of the expansion of a global system whereby areas that, within the context of the world system paradigm, were once on the periphery are now expanding into the core." (12) Unlike the older generation of immigrants, the new overseas Chinese are typified by movements of the highly skilled, and many of them are key players in regional and global economic networks. They are an elite group in terms of education, skill and

wealth and Asians make up of the majority of this westbound migration. Skeldon describes, "By the early 1990s, Asians accounted for almost 40 percent of migration to the United States…, 44 percent of migration to Canada, and almost half of migration to Australia." (41) In Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Thailand, ethnic Chinese have also figured prominently. The outflow of the highly educated and skilled has also characterized the other three "Asian Tigers": South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore. South Korea was estimated to have had 10 percent of its high-level manpower migrate to the United States during the 1970s. In Taiwan, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, around 2,000 students per annum left to the United States. In the mid-1980s, this rose to over 5,000 per annum. Usually only about one-quarter from any one year have ever returned. In 1991-92, 35,550 students from Taiwan and 25,720 students from South Korea left for the United States. Skeldon asserts that with Hong Kong people (and other Asians elite) moving into key areas, often global cities, the resulting networks established by the new overseas Chinese (and Asians) are fundamental linkages in the creation of any "new world order" in the post-Cold War era.

Westerners brought with them, among many other things of Industrial Age, the novelty of the century – the motion picture. As movies became popular in China, they brought not only the hardware, but also the software - the social values and norms associated with entertainment industry. Shanghai and Hong Kong became the production centers of Chinese cinema. Businessmen and entertainers used to be at the bottom of Confucian social hierarchy, and were hardly ever associated with wealth and power, not to mention social prestige. The rise of the United States to superpower status was accompanied by the global presence of Hollywood, which glorifies the entertainment business and celebrates commercial culture. Movie stars become celebrities and Hollywood became the Mecca of the motion picture business. Not long

ago, filmmaking in Hong Kong was still stigmatized as an illegitimate business which only the low class and uneducated would join. In 1973, when Josephine Siao returned to Hong Kong with a bachelors degree from the United States, she was dubbed by the media as "the movie star with a bachelors degree." This is symptomatic of the perception of the general low education level of the movie stars of that generation. The Western educated Hong Kong New Wave generation joining the film industry and producing critically acclaimed films helped reduce this stigma. The elevation of the social status of the film industry helped to draw more educated and professional people to join this business. Despite the lack of high regard in cinema from the states as in other Chinese societies, in the 1990s Hong Kong filmmakers worked out Hong Kong's cultural redemption among its people and became the equals to the Mandarin and Western cinemas in the domestic market. In the overseas market, the discursively constructed positive image of Hong Kong as a success facilitated the export of Hong Kong cinema with the myth "Hong Kong Wonder" embedded.

A LEGLESS BIRD

Situated in a precarious city, Hong Kong cinema has always been always crisis ridden. In the 1990s, the Hong Kong film industry had to be made even more flexible to adapt to its even more unusual external conditions by reshaping the industry and changing the tools and methods that no longer worked. The industry was not tied to any political or economic power bloc; it was switched modes to an almost guerilla-like independent filmmaking, and the movies changed to a more cosmopolitan outlook for its more affluent East Asian and Western markets. Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s was a political Laputa, an industrial amoeba and a cultural chameleon forced to adapt to its unpredictable changing milieu. But without the backing of the power bloc, the foundation of a studio system and the stability of a sizable market, the Hong Kong film industry was

further streamlined to the point of being crippled like a legless bird. It has no reserves in terms of talents, a movie library or accumulated capital for long-term planning and future development. With its cottage-industry outlook and massively produced low budget quickies, the industry was mistaken seen as regressing. Hong Kong cinema, like bamboo, continued to survive by being flexible and adaptive. A closer look will show that it went beyond mere survival, and in fact made some impressive progress and innovations, not only as enhancements of the 1960s filmmaking practice, but also as a forerunner in world cinema. The progress ranged from tangible remodeling of theaters to re-conceptualizing filmmaking.

The most remarkable difference in the 1990s was the filmmakers capitalizing on city branding (the positive image of Hong Kong as a modern liberal city, especially vis-à-vis China in the 1990s) in the narratives of their entertainment films. Operating as a transnational cinema without a nation in the world market, Hong Kong filmmakers could not resort to the branding of national cinema in the U.S. market or European film festivals. Director branding, beyond the narrow definition of art cinema auteurism, was not only a marketing device to encourage repeated consumption but also effective for promoting community recognition. This has helped Hong Kong cinema to stand out in the global market. Production in this decade was mostly genre and star driven and matched with target markets. Hong Kong star Maggie Cheung was praised by Western film critics as a "symbol of modernity" from a modern city (Berenice). Hong Kong action film was no longer the un-differentiable kung fu Chop suey, but an action aesthetic with formal style as well as heart and soul. Action film masters like John Woo are internationally recognized. Since everything must be geared to adapt successfully to the

opportunities a hit movie presents, Hong Kong filmmakers switched back to the *pianhua* system, a flexible cash-based mode of financing to provide them with greater flexibility and autonomy in production. Bureaucracy and paper work were reduced. Bank loan financing was not involved. "Development hell" and executive meetings were dodged or minimized. It is this mode of financing that enabled Hong Kong filmmakers to be more spontaneous and make more personal films. In the case of Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s it was the style of filmmaking practice that influenced the mode of financing. The domestic exhibition sector, formerly characterized by the big screening hall and resistance to the new rating system, gradually remolded their theaters to adapt to the world trend of the segmented market and the flexible arrangement of the multiplex. Hong Kong filmmakers gradually became more adept in battling the censorship rules and beating the consensus-building colonial government at their own game by playing the public-opinion card. They also invoked international law to point out the lack of legal basis of the government censorship ordinance implemented by the British, who claimed an intention to bring law and order to the colonized. They capitalized on the attention of the international media, as Hong Kong approaching 1997, to demand that the "positively non-interventionist" government protect filmmakers from triad harassment. The producers played an important role as facilitator of the film director, and developed a management style that fitted the Hong Kong film industry's duo-department and flat organization structure. The younger generation of screenwriters humbled themselves by accepting a reduced status of being the director's service provider, in order to produce film-able scripts, in paper or mental form. Following are detailed descriptions of four

areas of development: the exhibition sector, government film policy and the filmmaker's censorship battles, and the adjustment of the roles of the producer and the screenwriter. It will show the peculiar way the Hong Kong film industry worked, and why it worked in that particular environment.

EXHIBITION SECTOR- THE LOCOMOTIVE OF THE INDUSTRY

The domestic market box office was symbolically significant even though it constituted only a minority portion of box office return and its size was minuscule. Traditionally Hong Kong box office record was used as index for setting the price for the movies sold overseas.[53] In 2000, Taiwan director Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* was premiered in Hong Kong in its Asian tour. In 2009, Mainland China director Feng Xiaogang, the top box office director for a decade in a country of over 1.3 billion population, brooded on Hong Kong audience ignoring his movie.[54] Before the new millennium Hollywood had less than 30% market share in Hong Kong. American film scholar David Bordwell writes about this in the opening chapter of his book, even though in later chapters he insists that in quantitative term that "Hollywood of the East" is still Hollywood. It proofs that audience recognition in this tiny market was symbolically significant to filmmakers and film scholars like Ang Lee, Feng Xiaogang and David Bordwell. It was like Hong Kong theater had the power to consecrate the movies as genuine popular film among Chinese. The exhibition sector (domestic or overseas) played a leading role in the system of Hong Kong cinema. Instead of passively waiting to be fed by the production sector, it was like a locomotive steering the direction of the industry development. It could impede the introduction of rating system and market

segmentation but it could also help boost the rise of independent productions and de-integrate the industry. But how the domestic exhibition sector worked and why it was not dominated by Hollywood always intrigued industry outsider.

In early 1992, the director of the Newport distribution company Chan Wing-mei[55] openly admitted to rigging the box office figures of *The Magic Touch* (1992, dir: Michael Hui), which was competing with Clifton Ko's *All's Well End's Well* during the Chinese New Year holidays. This admission stirred up the public, and became talk of the town even though the practice of rigging box office figures had long been an open secret of the industry. This was the second time a rigged set of figures was done so blatantly, and then become widely reported beyond the circle of industry insiders. In 1984, it was Cinema City versus Golden Harvest over their Chinese New Year films ("*hesui pian*" the Chinese New Year's season greeting film). Both sides printed ads in newspapers "congratulating" each other's unbelievable box office figures. As in 1992, the producer eventually openly admitted rigging the figures. This discussion and controversy over the issue of getting accurate box office figures has gone on for years, and has been published in multiple issues of Film Bi-weekly[56] the only and longest running film magazine of the 1980s-1990s. The two most vocal writers on this issue are Li Cheuk-to and Chan Ching Wai. Li criticizes Chan's method of calculation as not scientific, and Chan criticizes Li for idealizing Western statistical practice. Chan Pak Sang, editor-in-chief of City Entertainment, in his op-ed titled "How to promote Hong Kong cinema without data support?" (P. S. Chan) points out the difficulty of getting objectively reliable industry data. He says in Hong Kong one can easily get detailed figures on the production, export

and import of industrial products from the government industry and commerce department, but no government department keeps track of the number of Hong Kong films being released in a year. The censorship department only records the number of films being processed in this department, which includes films for film festivals, art centers and video films. The MPIA[57] (Motion Picture Industry Association) cannot give any accurate figures because many films cannot be easily categorized as Hong Kong productions, not to mention many have been export-only and are not for release in Hong Kong. What is surprising amidst these arguments is that the industry insiders were not bothered by the incident, and it did not slow down their business. The lack of published reliable box office figures did not paralyze the industry, or even deter it from thriving in the world market in the 1990s. In response to the incident, Bill Kong[58], president of the Hong Kong Theatre Association of that year said, "I think this is completely not a problem. The box office figures provided by the MPIA are not based on any standard anyway. So long as industry insiders know the box office, it is good enough. The box office is just a reference. The newspapers printed the figures only to make their film section look more substantial." (He Huixian 21) In 1984, the issue went through various government departments such as the Consumer Council, TV and Film Bureau and the censorship department. After deliberation the censorship department responded with an absurd solution: banning the use of box office figures on all film publicity material. Filmmaker Ng See-yuan[59] argues that it was unfair because the film owner had nothing to do with the theater owners reporting the box office figures, but they were the one who suffered from this banning.("Who Dares to Break the Law") In 1992 when the rigging

happened again, the censorship department could do nothing about it, because since 1987 film publicity material no longer had to pass through this department for approval. The censorship department's authority was limited to checking if the publicity material contained erotic content. The MPIA, publishing the daily box office report, made an announcement requesting that fellow film workers practice self-discipline. However, many agree that there was no way to stop rigging by either government regulation or by industry self-discipline. The fact that the industry has been operating all these years without objective market data is intriguing to outsiders. How did the Hong Kong film industry survive all these years without accurate market feedback, such as box office data? How did the exhibition sector work, and what was its role in the system of Hong Kong cinema?

In the Hong Kong film industry, the exhibition sector provided market feedback to the production sector not by box office numbers, but by loaning money to production companies when directly ordering the specific films they wanted for their theaters. Instead of playing a passive role of providing venues for screening and reporting box office data, the exhibition sector was the locomotive of the industry, and had an active role in the system of Hong Kong cinema. Being both the financier and the customer of film products, it set the direction and pace for the production sector, laying down the parameters for the industry on issues like business practice and the censorship system. Situated at the frontline of customer service, it served as the cultural antenna in feeling the cultural pulse and feeding it back to the production sector. This practice in the exhibition sector influenced what kinds of films were to be made and how films were

made. In the case of Hong Kong cinema, the mode of financing and mode of exhibition influenced both the style of filmmaking and film texts. Even though the Hong Kong film industry did not have the studio practices of blind selling and block booking to secure the theater outlet in local and overseas markets, the Hong Kong film industry ran like Hollywood in classical era, with the production sector regularly feeding massive products to fill up the screening halls, a practice Tino Balio calls "feeding the maw of exhibition". (Balio) In the 1990s the market of the exhibition sector was structured in a way that favored independent productions. It was the strength of the exhibition sector that helped protect the domestic market from Hollywood encroachment. Hong Kong filmmakers did not enjoy government support and protection. It was the Hong Kong exhibition sector's decades of "tough love" that pushed Hong Kong movies to be exportable and competitive in overseas markets even in the age of globalization.

That Hong Kong theater businessmen have been running their business without precise business information such as box office data is intriguing to outsiders. But one man's uncertainty is another man's routine. In fact, Hong Kong's box office data report was started not by local concerns, but by the initiation of the branch offices of Hollywood majors in Hong Kong. The "obscure" way the local theater owners worked, the petite size of the distribution sector, and the small ratio of theaters for foreign-language films helped impede Hollywood's massive advancement into the Hong Kong domestic market from the 1980s to the early 1990s. Hollywood seldom dominated the Hong Kong market. The history of the Hong Kong cinema starts with the exhibition sector, not the production sector. The strength of the exhibition sector was its flexibility in adapting to the volatile

market. In this British colony there were no anti-trust laws. The market structure was determined solely by market forces, without government decree. Local theater owners could make swift decisions to merge or separate, and either collude or compete with each other. They could switch from foreign films to Shanghai productions, or to local productions without concerns for screen quotas like in other national cinemas. In the 1920s Chinese businessmen quickly formed horizontal integration of theater chains all over major Chinese coastal cities. Lu Gen and Lo Ming-you were dubbed the "King of South China theater chain" and the "King of North China theater chain" respectively. After World War I, the supply of European productions reduced drastically. Instead of being trapped by Hollywood majors' binding long-term contracts, and monopolizing practices such as block booking and blind selling, Lu Gen swiftly turned to Shanghai productions for a more favorable deal. At that time local theater owners only had to pay a royalty fee to the Shanghai producers, and all box office income went to the theater owner. The theater owners did not have to share profits with the producers/distributors. In 1933, Lu Gen and Lo Ming-yau merged their gigantic theater chains to challenge the Hollywood majors' trust. Their production company Lianhua became the biggest studio, and unprecedented in Chinese film history. Even though the attempt failed in the end, it demonstrated the pivotal position of the exhibition sector in the Chinese film industry. In Hong Kong and Chinese film histories, the production sector was strong when the exhibition sector was also strong, regardless if the industry was vertically integrated or not, and we can see that the 1930s and 1940s were considered the golden era of Chinese cinema. The 1980s and 1990s were considered the longest stretch of prosperity of Hong

Kong cinema. Since the 1980s, theater chains for Chinese language films occupied over 70% to 80% of total theaters in Hong Kong. Many of these were family businesses passing from generation to generation and were also involved in real estate business. For foreign language film theater chains, the deal was less favorable since the theater owners had to share part of the advertising and the publicity fee. In the mid-1980s, for Chinese language films the advertising and publicity fee was about 10% of the box office (not of the production costs) and the filmmakers were already complaining. According to Chan Ching Wai's report, for example, for a film that grossed over a 10 million HKD, the advertising fee would be 1 million HKD; a 5 million gross would be 500,000 HKD. And the ratio of profit sharing usually was not favorable to the theater owners. But with local production, the theater owner usually got 60% and the film owners got 40%. Gradually over the years, when Hong Kong local productions were proven to produce hit after hit, some theaters switched from showing the more prestigious foreign films to local features for a more favorable deal. Some even became investor/financiers to secure the exhibition rights of Hong Kong produced films.

A browse at a history of the box office report reveals that Hong Kong film industry insiders rarely relied on box office reports to operate their business. According to Chan Ching Wai's interview of a theatre insider, the box office report started with the Hong Kong branches of the Hollywood eight majors (C. W. Chan "Theaters Fake") The branches had to report their box office performance back to their American headquarters every day. This was before the age of the internet, and other hi-tech international communication. After a while the American headquarters also wanted the box office

information of other companies for reference. From then onward, the theater insiders exchanged information with each other and that practice became an unwritten rule. In 1969, the Entertainment News, an industry subscription-based daily publication had more than 95% of theaters participating. The data came from participating theatres' daily self-reporting. This publication was intended for industry insiders only. In an article titled "The possibility and extent of exaggerating box office figure" Chan Ching Wai argues that the data was accurate and reliable because the daily report was further broken down to individual film, individual theater and individual theater circuit. With such detail, there was not much leeway for fooling industry insiders who were familiar with the performance patterns of their theaters (C. W. Chan "Possibility ") When I was riding in my producer friend Rita Fung's car to a location shooting one night, I overheard her asking about the box office of certain theaters showing her film.[60] Fung explained that by asking the performance of a few flagship theaters that night, the producers usually have confidence in estimating the overall box office of the film and planning their next move. Writer-producer Chan Hing Kai in his column article titled "the box office data is known before the film is released" confirms this (H. K. Chan "Box Office Data "). He explains how and why the industry insiders can make accurate estimates. Even though his article was published in 2008, it also applies in the 1990s, as the 1990s' market was even simpler. Chan Hing Kai says the reason is simple. For those who were familiar with distribution, they could tell the overall box office just by the number of theaters and screens of the opening day. Chan Hing Kai describes, "The theater chain owners have their people watching every film to be released in the same time period, before deciding

the number of theaters for showing the film they bought. These people are market experts. They make decisions according to their past experience. They will fully utilize every theater and every screen." In 2008, the theater owners could take advantage of the flexibility of the multiplex in scheduling. Back in the 1990s, theater chains could collude or compete to get the best out of the top hit movies. Chan Hing Kai continues, "Those film acquisition experts of the theater chains watch many more films than average people. Besides, they face the audience everyday and thus know very well what the audience likes. They won't be slow in re-scheduling theaters and screens when they see a hit film…. If the opening box office is not good, they instantly cut it before waiting for the word of mouth to spread. That is why they rarely underestimate a hit film." Given the expense of theater rent, it is understandable that Hong Kong theater owners, when presented with a more favorable, bigger profit sharing ratio, were highly motivated to fully utilize the screening halls and maximize their own profit even it meant dropping the less-than-top films early at the expense of the film owners. The competition in the domestic market was no less fierce than the international one. The exhibition sector was supportive of the production sector by funding projects and making the funding procedure simple, but was also tough on them when the films didn't perform at the very top.

The petite size of the exhibition sector is most probably the reason why this sector could operate flexibly and made it possible for experts to watch every single film and then make quick decisions according to their past experience, instead of relying on published objective data. The number of theaters in Hong Kong in 1961 was only 67 with

280,000 seats (C. W. Chan *Structure*). In 1981, there were 81 theaters.(C. W. Chan "Fake Box Office") Even at its peak in 1994, Hong Kong had only 132 theaters with 202 screens and 121,765 seats.

Table 5.1 The Petite Size of the Exhibition Sector of Hong Kong Cinema (1989-1998)

	No. of theater	No. of screens	No. of seats	HK Production Gross take HK (USD) million	Total Gross take HK (USD) million
1989	116	151	125,747	879 (112.99)	Not available
1990	121	164	128,295	939	1,313 (168.77)
1991	123	173	126,269	1,038	1,377
1992	124	183	125,410	1,240 (159.38)	1,573 (202.19)
1993	131	184	123,034	1,146 (147.30)	1,580 (203.08)
1994	132	202	121,765	973	1,423
1995	122	200	107,032	785	1,357
1996	111	201	96,833	686	1,323
1997	101	199	87,564	546	1,163
1998	91	197	79,791	Not available	1,059

In 1979, when the Hong Kong economy was about to take off, and the period that saw the rise of the Chinese business moguls, the total gross take of Hong Kong theaters was 403 million HKD (about 51.8 million USD). Hong Kong productions took up only one third of the total gross. But by 1982, after the Sino-British talks started, Hong Kong productions already took up more than half of the total gross (over 57% of the market share). In the 1990s, when a handful Chinese land barons dominated local economic growth, Hong Kong productions took up over 70% of the market (79% in 1992 and 73%

in 1993). Nevertheless, no matter how big the market share of Hong Kong productions was, the total gross take of Hong Kong was still minuscule when compared to that of neighboring countries, not to mention Hollywood. At the peak of Hong Kong theaters' gross in 1993, even if Hollywood were to devour the entire Hong Kong theater market, the total gross take was only 1,580 million HKD (203.08 million USD). In the 1970s there was still the impression that Hong Kong was off the radar of U.S. foreign policy. In the 1980s the Sino-British talks were at a deadlock. British hongs lost out to Chinese businesses in the real estate market, due to their lack of confidence and long-term commitment to the city. Given the meager monetary return of Hong Kong theaters, it is doubtful that the Hollywood majors would be motivated to take risks in Hong Kong's volatile real estate market to acquire more theatres, or to lobby Washington to intervene aggressively in this tiny and obscure market by administrative means while Hong Kong was still a colony of Britain, American's ally.

Table 5.2 Gross Take in Hong Kong Theaters (1979-1983)

	Hong Kong Production Gross take HKD (USD) million	Total Gross take HKD (USD) million
1979	133	403 (51.80)
1980	184	492 (63.24)
1981	242	567 (72.88)
1982	404	701 (90.10)
1983	411	788 (101.29)

In 1985, Film Bi-Weekly ran a series on "Theater Review" covering all 98 current theaters and 53 demolished theaters in Hong Kong in only 18 pages[61]. The information

includes Chinese and English names of the theaters, photos of the theaters, addresses, phone numbers, name of the managers, class of seat and ticket price of each class, total number of seats, box office of each screening and total box office of 5 screenings in a day. The box office figures are exact down to the last digit. The Film Bi-Weekly[62] office had only a handful of staff but still could list such detailed information. Therefore, it was possible for the MPIA, government or another organization to get accurate box office information if they really wanted to, without resorting to sophisticated statistic techniques or an army of accountants. However, in such a small exhibition sector, it is doubtful that local theater owners would be motivated to spend the extra executive costs to tidy up their sloppy accounting practices, since they could already make an educated guess of the information by experience. Hong Kong box office income was unnoticeable to Hollywood and insignificant even in the Hong Kong economy. Even though the Hong Kong film industry was export-oriented, its contribution to Hong Kong's foreign exchange earning was unimportant. In an article titled "Meager Hong Kong film export trade" published in 1982, Chan Ching Wai was cautious about Law Kar's prediction of the Hong Kong film industry's prosperity, and becoming the Hollywood of the East in the near future. Chan Ching Wai writes that in 1982 Hong Kong had only 84 theaters and the population was 5.1 million. In his tables and statistics, he shows how unimpressive the Hong Kong film industry's impact was, in terms of Hong Kong's overall import, export and entrêpot trade. He writes, "In 1981, the total film export is $85,135,525 and the import is $34,208,660. That brings $50,926,865 in foreign exchange earnings. In the same year, Hong Kong's total import is over 138 billion and the total export is over 122

billion. The deficit is 16 billion. Hong Kong film import is 0.25% of total import and 0.68% of total export. The film entrêpot is $28,116,501. This is an extremely insignificant figure in Hong Kong's enormous entrêpot trade. Hong Kong film industry as a source of foreign exchange earning is very insignificant." (C. W. Chan "Meager" 44) The Hong Kong film industry was small, and the Hong Kong government was even smaller in terms of spending. Chan Ching Wai did an interesting statistical comparison in 1981 to verify this (C. W. Chan "Why Do We Spend"). In 1980 the total gross take of Hong Kong cinema is about 500 million HKD. It was two times the colonial government spending on executive costs (245 million HKD), education (219 million HKD) and urban council and recreational facilities (215 million). It was close to government spending on defense (453 million HKD). Therefore it is doubtful that such a small government would be motivated to facilitate, or be involved in the petite Hong Kong film industry as it had been in the manufacturing industry in the 1970s and the servicing industry in the 1990s. Nevertheless, Chan Ching Wai reiterates the significance of Hong Kong cinema, in non quantitative terms, "Those figures illustrate how insignificant Hong Kong film industry is in Hong Kong's overall import and export trade. But they don't reflect the importance of Hong Kong cinema. Film, when compared with other commercial products, has greater influence. When we compare the same commercial product with that of other countries we can show how important this product (film) is in the world." (C. W. Chan "Meager") The perceived power of Hong Kong cinema was much greater than its actual total gross take. Chan Ching Wai quotes the Taiwan TV and film workers' protest against Hong Kong films to illustrate this point: "In 1981, the total cost of Hong Kong films exported

to Taiwan is only about 9 million HKD (about 1.16 million USD). The cost for the first quarter of this year is only 2.2 million HKD (about 0.28 million USD). But that already provoked disturbances. Taiwan TV and film workers united together to protest and complain about Hong Kong cinema threatening them. They urged for a restricting quota for Hong Kong film imports. This illustrates the impact of 85 million dollar film export. But compared with the billion American dollar foreign exchange earnings of Hollywood, Hong Kong as 'Hollywood of the East' is so minuscule. And in the near future, we still will not be able to extricate ourselves from such a minuscule condition." (C. W. Chan "Meager") The petite size of the exhibition sector might have enabled theater businessmen to operate flexibly, and the meager income might probably de-motivate Hollywood and the colonial government from getting involved or intervening in this sector. But being minuscule did not make Hong Kong cinema less significant or market competition less fierce. Unlike the film industries of neighboring countries, the government and Hollywood were not the overriding factors in the development of this sector of the industry. Hong Kong theater businesses enjoyed relative autonomy and adapted themselves quickly to market changes. Within a couple of decades the exhibition sector switched swiftly between integration and de-integration, collusion and competition, and among foreign language films, Mandarin films and Cantonese films. They expanded the theaters or remodeled them into multiplexes, etc. In the 1990s, theaters were opened and closed, and theater circuits were set up and shut down at a quicker pace.

In the 1980s and 1990s film companies can be roughly categorized into two types: the big companies and the independents (C. W. Chan "Big Companies"). The big companies refer to those who own or have secured access to theater chains. Shaw studio owning its own theatre chain was a typical big company. Cinema City had secured access to Golden Princess's theater chain and thus was a big company. D & B signed a rental contract with Shaw's theater chain and thus was regarded as a big company. Independent companies were those without secured theater chains, and most of them were smaller in scale. But some independent companies could be large in scale like Win's. In the immediate post-war years, theaters were divided into three types according to the languages of the films: foreign-language theaters showing mostly Hollywood and Western films, Mandarin film theaters, and Cantonese film theaters. Foreign-language theaters had the highest ticket price and social status, Mandarin film theaters were at the middle, and Cantonese at the bottom. But since the 1980s with the cessation of Mandarin film production, the theaters were re-categorized and divided into two groups: foreign-language film theater and Chinese-language film theater. Since then, theater chains for Chinese language films have occupied over 70% to 80% of the total number of theaters and over 70% of the box office.

By late 1970s, Shaw studio production started to decline and its theater circuit was filled with the studio's generic performance sex and violence films, while the Golden Harvest theater circuit was boosted by films from its satellite production houses. The Shaw studio started to incorporate younger directors into their productions. Golden Harvest colluded with the Lai Shing circuit to beat the Shaw circuit. In the early 1980s

seeing the threat from the rapid rise of Cinema City (backed by Golden Princess theater circuit), Shaw and Golden Harvest joined their theater chains to maximize the box office of their respective movies. In 1987, Newport, a new theater circuit was set up. The owner Chan Wing-mei came from a theater business family. His father and his father's friends switched between foreign films and local productions whenever they saw fit. This not only changed the tripartite balance of power, but also opened up a big outlet for independent productions and facilitated their rise (Lan 9) since Newport opened up the prime time slot for independent films[63] while the big companies reserved the prime time slots for their own productions. Unlike the big companies, Newport did not have its own production company but it did loan money to independent productions. Chan Wing-mei's personal way of doing business is typical of that era. In response to the question of the type of filmmakers he would loan money to, Chan says, "First of all we will see if the producer is reliable; we'll look at his track record; next is director and cast. We don't know how to assess a script. We can't tell what is good or bad. But, if the cast is strong, even if you give him over a million, there is a big chance we can make the money back. If there is no strong cast, then you can read the script and see if there is anything attractive and interesting. But to be honest, we don't understand that. We won't do it and we don't have an expert responsible for this (reading the script)." (Lan 9) Chan emphasized his reliance on the personnel rather than the script or idea when someone presented him a project proposal. "It depends on who that person is. This is a small circle and it is easy to ask around and check out information about that person." (Lan 9) Chan reiterated his reliance on stars, "Now that we switch back to star system, if they have a

strong cast, if the amount they ask for is not too much, and if we can figure we can get it back, then we will loan the money to him." (Lan 9) In the 1990s most projects were star-led productions. Genre, character, story and the crew all revolved around the star. Chan said he could be flexible in the method of payment. He says, "Our way of working is the same as the others. When the filmmaker has tight cash flow, we will loan him a big sum of money first and pay the rest later. For example, you now have a movie that is reaching 10 million box office. And you are waiting to shoot your next 3 million budget film. We will give you that 3 million first and deal with the rest later." Chan's flexible mode of financing was common practice in the 1990s. Wong Jing says having the financier be lenient and flexible with the cash flow makes a huge difference for him to work smoothly (Cindy S.C. Chan "Wong Jing"). Back then there were only a few bosses (film financiers) in Hong Kong. Almost everyone knew everyone and people relied on the honor system. The procedure for launching a project was quite simple, no lawyer, contract and lengthy negotiation. Usually the filmmaker pitched the idea to the boss and shooting could start once the boss green-lighted it, even when the script was not completed, if there was one. The financiers only set the date of delivery, budget, cast and genre. The rest was all up to the filmmakers. There was no scrutiny of scripts or multiple executive meetings to green light the project. No bank loan was involved. It is due to such flexibility in financing that Hong Kong filmmakers could enjoy a free hand and improvisation in their shooting. In the case of Hong Kong cinema, it is this mode of financing that influenced the style of filmmaking.

Another interesting phenomenon of the Hong Kong exhibition sector is they have overlapping shareholders and staff across companies. For example, Fung Ping Chung was both a high ranking executive at Golden Princess and an important strategist for Newport (Lang "Fung Ping Chung"). Fung's father inherited the family architecture business while also working with Lu Gen (the King of Theater Chain of Southern China) in the foreign film sales and distribution business. After the Sino-Japanese war, Fung's father returned to Hong Kong and set up his architecture and real estate business and also set up his first theater. Fung's and Chan Wing-mei's fathers and uncles worked together in the theater business. Fung himself worked in the banking field until 1975 and joined the theater business in 1961. These two business partners inherited wide connections from their fathers. The establishment of Newport opened up more opportunities for independent productions and invigorated the industry.

It is amazing that Hong Kong filmmakers survived the cut throat competition in the 1980s market. In 1983, besides the domination of the big companies, independent production also faced reinvigorated forces from Hollywood. In the foreign film theaters Hollywood blockbusters like *E.T., First Blood, Top Gun,* the *Star Wars series,* the *Superman series* and the *James Bond series,* etc. continued to flood into Hong Kong. But Chan Ching Wai was optimistic about local production. According to his analysis, Chinese language films still had a big share of the box office. In 1980, it was 54%; 1981, 58%; 1982, 68% (C. W. Chan "Chinese Language Films").

Throughout the 1980s to 1990s there were three to five major theater chains of Chinese-language films. There was parallel development between the exhibition sector

and the production sector. While the production sector went from the Shaw monopoly to a tripartite oligarchy (Golden Harvest, Cinema City, and D & B) of the 1980s to the multiple independent productions of the 1990s, the exhibition sector also went from oligarchy domination to musical chair rotation. Both the production and exhibition sectors changed from concentration to diffusion of power. In the 1970s, in the exhibition sector, the big two were Shaw and Golden Harvest. In 1984, the big three were Golden Harvest, Golden Princess and D & B. In 1986, the Shaw theater chain closed. In 1987, Newport was set up but did not have its own production company. In 1992, the four major theater chains were Golden Harvest, Golden Princess, Newport and Regal. The Golden Princess theater chain closed in 1992. Since then the musical chair pattern accelerated: in 1993, Mandarin opened and Regal closed. In 1994, Mandarin closed. In 1996, the three majors were Golden Harvest, Empire Theatrical Circuit and Newport. In 1997, Mandarin formed a new chain with another company…

The diffusion of power in the exhibition sector can be discerned from the change in the outlook of the theater chains. During the oligarchy domination period, i.e. before the mid-1980s, each theatre chain had its own distinctive look. This indicates the active and significant role of theater in the system of Hong Kong cinema. In an article in 1980 Manfred Wong describes the distinctive look of each theater circuit. In the late 1960s at the peak of Cantonese cinema, Wong describes that "just by mentioning the name of the theaters like Globe, Tai Ping, Kam Ling, Pei Ho, Yaumatei, we all know they are for local features." (16) In 1980, there were four circuits for local productions. Local production back then was regarded as "low taste, gimmicky and sentimental" (16) "Even

though Shaw has its loyal fans for its mid-night screening, the intellectual audience for Golden Harvest must be a bigger crowd… the theaters of the Royal Theatre circuit are located at obscure corners. Its box office performance has not been great. But with Jackie Chan's kung fu flicks and Bang Bang Company's publicity, it can do better. And, with its better profit-sharing offer, it should be able to attract quality local films." (16) Wong also describes the circuits run by pro-Leftist organizations and theater circuits for foreign films. In those days, "the types of films the theater shows in the long run will gradually constitute the distinctive look of that theater. And audience chooses on the basis of that distinctive brand look." (16) But as more new competitors joined the field and competition got keener, theater circuits all chased after the biggest hit films. In the early 1990s, the distinctive theater circuit look no long existed. Chan Wing-mei said it was then all mixed up, and the theater chains could not be differentiated by the styles of films they showed (J. Lin 43). In the past, the theater chains of Shaw and Cathay, and later Golden Harvest and Cinema City, all had their own distinctive image. But by the mid-1980s, there were a lot of variations and changes. Except for extreme examples like theaters for porn films, there was no need for branding a theater circuit by giving each chain a distinctive image. The four theater chains had comparable competitive power, and film production companies could choose among the four theater chains for themselves. Chan Wing-mei says it was drastically different from the past when certain production companies could only show their films exclusively in certain designated chains.

As competition got keener, films competing for the prime time slot started to have a mass-market formulaic look. The advantage of big companies was that their own

productions had priority to get the prime time slot in their own theater circuits. According to Chan Ching Wai's analysis, the four major prime-time slots occupied around 60% of the entire year's gross take. From 1987 to 1997, the gross take in the summer (about 65 days) of Hong Kong production was 24.88% of total Hong Kong films gross take; the Chinese New Year (about 15 days) was 13.92%; the Christmas/New Year (about 15 days) was 8.72%, and the Easter holiday (about 10 days) was 6.1%. (C. W. Chan *Structure*). During the boom time, the big companies' own productions may fill up the entire year's slot. Films produced particularly for the Chinese New Year are called *hesui pian* (Chinese New Year Season Greeting film). Chan Ching Wai calls these formulaic big budget *hesui pian* "Spring Festival Couplet[64] Film" such as *Kung Hei Fat Choy* (1985, Cinema City), *The Eight Happiness*, (1988, Cinema City), *The Fun, the Luck and the Tycoon* (1990, Cinema City), and *The Perfect Match* (1991, D & B). Another prominent example of prime-time slot formulaic films are Clifton Ko and Raymond Wong's *It's a Mad Mad World* series (1987, 1988, 1989 D & B), the *All's Well Ends Well* series (1992, Ko Chi Sum/Regal; 1993 Golden Harvest; 1997 Mandarin), and *It's a Wonderful World* (1994, Mandarin). These are usually star-studded mass entertainment comedies. Having a time slot for the Chinese New Year time became an index of power. The 1980s "Spring Festival Couplet Films" were also recognized by their company trademark style, such as Cinema City's deluxe-packaged middle class comedies. They are impressive because of the number of stars in them, but did not give full play to star power just yet. In the 1990s the production company trademark style subsided and the Chinese New Year holidays time slot was almost completely reserved

for big budget star vehicles. “Two Chows one Cheng” became a staple of the holiday season. “Two Chows” refers to Chow Yun-fat and Stephen Chow. “Cheng” refers to “Cheng Long,” Jackie Chan’s Chinese stage name. The 1990s Chinese New Years were filled with feel-good festive Jackie Chan action adventure spectacles, Stephen Chow’s signature *mouleitou* (roughly meaning nonsense) comedies and Chow Yun-fat’s heart warming comedies, which extended his persona as the most homely star from TV. The box office success of these star-vehicle Chinese New Year films was so sweeping, that distribution companies of Hollywood features wouldn’t want their Hollywood blockbuster to compete head to head with these local productions. Often they voluntarily gave way. The Chinese New Year time slot was the battle ground where local productions had the overwhelming advantage. Gradually there became a link between time slot and film style: the Chinese New Year was the venue for family comedy, and the summer holiday was for action adventure. In the 1980s, big companies with big theaters called for formulaic mass entertainment at the production end. For example, Cinema City backed by the Golden Princess theater circuit churned out its 9-reel formulaic films productions.

Films released during non-prime time slots varied greatly. The big companies’ prime time slot advantage was not absolute. This was especially so in the 1990s. During the down time, when the big companies did not want to take risks, they opened up their non-prime time slots to the independents. There are various factors that gradually decrease the significance of the prime-time slot. With a larger variety of entertainment available, movie watching was no longer the prime option during holidays. And, as Hong

Kong production came to depend more and more on overseas markets, the Chinese New Year prime time slot effect was not applicable to non-Chinese societies. The movies had to sell themselves. The most prominent example in history is Bruce Lee's *Fist of Fury* shown in 1972 from March 1 to April 19, during relatively quiet season. It was produced by Golden Harvest, newly formed after Raymond Chow left the Shaw studio and became a formidable challenge to his former boss. In the 1990s, the most prominent surprise hit was the drug-lord film *To Be Number One* (produced by Johnny Mak) released from April 5 to June 3 for 60 days, an unusually long showing for Hong Kong films. It ranked number three in 1991 and was shown in the Golden Harvest circuit. The success of this film led to numerous copycats of gangster and drug-lord films. In 1989 Jackie Chan's production *Mr. Canton and Lady*, "the Cantonese martial arts version of *A Pocketful of Miracle*" ("M.P.I.A. Yearbook"), was released on June 15, obviously targeting the summer youth market instead of the Chinese New Year family market. Even though it was launched shortly after the 1989 June 4th Incident, it was shown until July 27 and ranked second of that year. [65] While prime-time movies had a holiday formulaic look, non-prime-time movies tended to diversify and were more innovative. It was the time slot of exhibition which called for particular types of films.

The length of the shelf life also influenced the mode of production and style of films. Cantonese cinema in the 1950s and 1960s was known for its "Seven Day Wonder" productions, movies finished within seven days or less. Back then in the exhibition sector, local productions were generally shown for a week. The common practice was that, for the opening night, the film must reach a certain box office number or it would be

cut instantly. In the first week 60% of the profit went to the theater owners. The profit sharing ratio gradually decreased for the theaters in the following week. But theater owners set a minimum box office number. If the film could not reach that number by say Monday, it would be eliminated from the game. In the 1970s, local productions were generally only allowed a shorter shelf life in the theaters. For example, in 1979, for Chinese language films, even the top ten hits had only an average two weeks and a maximum three weeks' shelf life. ("Top 10 Box Office Hit of 1979") But the top ten foreign language films were shown from three weeks up to more than two months. Hong Kong productions had a shorter shelf life than foreign films even though their box office performances were in general higher than foreign films. If we divide the box office by number of days shown, the average box office per day of a Hong Kong film was much higher than that of a foreign film. This might be because either local film performance dropped sharply after two weeks, or foreign films were allowed to stay in theaters at a lower standard. Without a daily breakdown we cannot distinguish the tailing off patterns of these two groups of films. But obviously there was the pressure for Hong Kong films to open like dynamite, short and explosive. In 1979, most theaters for Chinese language films were big theaters and there was no rating system yet. There was a financial pressure to fill up the giant screening halls.

Table 5.3 1979 Top Ten Hong Kong and Foreign Films

Top Ten Hong Kong Films				
		box office	days	average per day
1	The Fearless Hyena	5,445,535	19	286,607
2	The Servant	4,798,177	21	228,485

Table 5.3 continue

3	Itchy fingers	4,086,632	17	240,390
4	The Proud Twins	4,009,486	16	250,593
5	The Magnificent Butcher	3,629,171	12	302,431
6	Cops and Robbers	3,497,812	16	218,613
7	*		14	
8	Lam Ah Chun Blunders Again	3,179,708	14	227,122
9	Odd Couple	2,961,417	12	246,785
10	His Name is Nobody	2,917,346	14	208,382

Top Ten Foreign Films				
		box office	days	average per day
1	Moonraker	7,864,054	64	122,875
2	Foul Play	3,938,329	59	66,751
3	Jaws 2	3,928,224	35	112,235
4	Superman	3,525,512	21	167,882
5	The Champ	3,452,947	36	95,899
6	Alien	3,245,922	30	108,194
7	Midnight Express	2,819,846	36	78,329
8	Force 10 from Navarone	2,458,748	28	87,812
9	Deer Hunter	2,446,382	34	71,952
10	Trinity Is Still My Name	2,229,786	23	96,947

*On Film Bi-weekly the number 7 film is Games Gambler Play. But this film was released in 1974. It was probably a typographical error.

In the 1980s, in the domestic market Hong Kong movies had to compete with New Hollywood's blockbusters. In the foreign markets, the Southeast Asia market was shrinking. As Chan Ching Wai points out, in Malaysia and Indonesia, there was anti-Chinese sentiment and the import of Hong Kong films were subject to changes in the political climate. In 1982, Indonesia further restricted their quota for Chinese language films from 35 to 25 films per year (C. W. Chan "Meager"). The Hong Kong film industry was in a dire situation, and it had to explore new international markets or fold. Hong

Kong film businessmen came up with the nerve wracking practice of the "Saturday mid-night premier". The director of the film had to sit inside the theater hall and watch the audience's response on the premier night. Usually this Saturday mid-night crowd was assumed to have attention-deficit disorder, and being boring was seen as the cardinal sin for Saturday night entertainment. Whenever there was moment of dead air time or simply silence in the audience, such as not laughing at the gag or not wowing to the stunt, the directors would have to re-edit or even reshoot the film. Coinciding with the emergence of high concept films in Hollywood, Hong Kong's Cinema City came up with its 9-reel formula. In the scripting stage, the film was divided into 9 reels and in each reel there had to be a sufficient number of gags and stunts evenly distributed to ensure a constant and high frequency of stimulation for the audience. Since the Cinema City days, Tsui Hark has carried this kinetic style in his films. The late James Wong said that Tsui Hark's films are like 90-minute trailers. He vividly describes the tense feeling he had when watching Tsui's films: he had only half of his butt sitting on the edge of the seat throughout the entire screening. In such a harsh environment, where local filmmakers had to compete with each other during the prime season, and with Hollywood productions during the non-prime season, Hong Kong movies always had to perform like an attention-seeking approval-addicted overachiever child, without the option of falling back on government protection or deep-pocket studio support. If the films performed less than the best, the theater owners would shorten the release days or switch to foreign films. Filmmakers had to act as if every film must be a hit, in order to compete for the screens

of the few dozen theaters in Hong Kong. The soaring real estate market in the 1990s made this competition even more cut-throat.

In the 1990s, Hong Kong was one of the most expensive cities in Asia. The Real estate market soared to phenomenal high. Big theaters of over 1,000 seats in individual buildings were demolished to give way to more lucrative retail businesses. Shopping malls sprung up everywhere. Multiplexes were embedded in shopping malls, and the function of cinema became to draw crowds to the mall, and not just during the Chinese New Year holidays, but all year round. Breakeven films were not good enough for that purpose. They wouldn't help draw large enough crowds, cover the rent or compete with the wide array of entertainment options in the mall. Sporadic independent surprise hits could not be provided in sufficient quantity or for a steady enough flow of supply. In districts with rent of over a hundred thousand dollars per square foot, shopping mall multiplexes needed a constant flow and large amounts of hit movies, be they local or foreign productions. Movie screening, as a business activity taking up over 90-minutes of such a high-rent space, must justify its existence by a high return. By the end of the 1990s the multiplex composed over 80% of the total number of theaters. The advantage of multiplex flexible scheduling is that it helps to maximize the profit of hit movies. The film industry in the 1990s, was characterized by endless sequels of hit movies (made by local production), and Hollywood-made star-vehicle blockbusters. To compete in the world market and with Hollywood in the domestic market, Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s was reduced to two exportable and competitive genres: action and comedy. This demonstrates that the mode of exhibition influenced what kinds of film were made.

The size of the screening hall had an impact on the adoption of a rating system in Hong Kong and the varieties of films being shown. In 1982 New Wave director Patrick Tam's *Nomad* was forced to be re-cut, even after it gotten a screening permit from the censorship department and was already being shown in the theaters. This re-censoring of the film created an uproar among Hong Kong filmmakers. In the midst of debate over the censorship of sexually explicit films, it was the theater owners who refused to adopt the film rating system, worrying that its adoption might send away family audiences and reduce the number of viewers, according to filmmaker Ng See Yuan.[66] In the early 1980s, the majority of Chinese-language film theaters were big theater (about 700 to over 1,000 seats) showing family friendly mass entertainment while foreign-language film theaters started migrating into multiplex or smaller size theaters (less than 500 seats). The rating system was practiced in foreign-language film theaters and on movies like *Last Tango in Paris*, shown in Palace Theater, which had proved commercially viable. Besides criticizing the double standard of the censorship department in their treatment of Hong Kong productions and foreign films, Ng See Yuan also points out the absurdity of government actions such as giving the screening permit but forbidding the printing of Chinese subtitles. Ng See-yuan says, "This is burying one's head in the sand. We can still understand a lot of things even without the Chinese subtitles. We did not protest against it because we don't want the government to also tighten the censorship on foreign films. This does not mean we approve the government's action." It was only in the mid-1990s when Chinese-language film theaters were gradually turning to multiplex or smaller theaters, that the three-tier rating system was adopted in 1994 (and amended in 1995). In

Hong Kong it was the exhibition sector that deterred market segmentation and impeded the production of niche market films. It was the size of the exhibition hall that influenced the types of films being produced.

Before the 1990s there was no lasting regular art house cinema circuit in Hong Kong. Foreign art films were shown sporadically in the City Hall, the Arts Centre, the Hong Kong International Film Festivals or by film clubs renting screening halls in schools or theaters on Sunday morning. In the 1970s, King Hu's classics, produced by the Shaw studio, were packaged as mainstream genre martial arts and shown in Shaw's theater circuit. Tang Shu Shuen's "counter cinema" film *Sup Sap Bup Dap* (1975), a poignant critique of patriarchal and commercial culture in Hong Kong was disguised as a commercial film (Yau). Tang Shu Shuen had a short career span, producing only four films before leaving Hong Kong. When the Chinese-language film theaters started to adopt the multiplex or remodel big theaters into small theaters, niche market films by Stanley Kwan, Wong Kar Wai and Fruit Chan started to emerge.

The MPIA's year-book divides Hong Kong theaters into three major geographic areas: Hong Kong Island, Kowloon peninsula and the New Territory. Hong Kong Island is where the City Hall, the Art Center and the headquarters of major banks are located. There are many Western expatriates living and working on this side of the city. The block Lan Kwai Fong with bars, restaurants and various entertainment venues was built to cater to this group of consumers. Foreign-language film theaters concentrated more in this area. Multiplex and art house theaters like Columbia Classic and Cine-Arts started on Hong Kong Island. The Mongkok district on the Kowloon Peninsula is known for its

teenage popular culture, and shops and theaters mostly cater to this group of consumers. The proliferation of the multiplex and the decline of big theaters (over 1,000 seats) was most pronounced in this area. The number of multiplex and small theaters rose from 6 in 1989 to 33 in 1998. Big theaters reduced from 30 in 1989 to 4 in 1998. The New Territory consists mostly new town government or private housing complexes. In this residential area, big theater or multiplex and small theaters do not show any big change. Big theaters reduced from 7 in 1989 to 1 in 1998. Multiplex and small theaters only increased from 12 in 1989 to 17 in 1998.

Table 5.4 Decline of Big Theater and Rise of Multiplex

	1989	**1990**	**1991**	**1992**	**1993**	**1994**	**1995**	**1996**	**1997**	**1998**
Total no. of seats	125747	128295	126269	125410	123034	121765	107032	96833	87564	79791
Total no. of theaters	116	121	123	124	131	132	122	111	101	91
Total no. of big theater	51	46	44	36	31	29	20	17	12	8
Total no. of multiplex or small theater	30	39	42	54	61	67	73	77	80	79
Hong Kong Island										
Number of seats	32,081	30779	30566	30246	31362	33740	24847	22294	20479	16051
Big theater	14	13	13	10	9	9	6	5	5	3
Multiplex or small	12	12	13	17	21	26	27	29	29	29
Kowloon										
Number of seats	62910	64803	61996	60164	58973	58204	51391	45386	40495	39027
Big theater	30	27	25	21	19	18	12	10	6	4
Multiplex or small	6	11	12	18	20	21	25	28	31	33
New Territory										
Number of seats	30756	32713	33707	35000	32699	29821	30794	29153	26590	24713
Big theater	7	6	6	5	3	2	2	2	1	1
Multiplex or small	12	16	17	19	20	20	21	20	20	17

(Big theater: over 1,000 seats; Multiplex: more than one screen; Small theater: below 500 seats.)

In 1989, the number of theaters with over 1,000 seats was almost half the total number of theaters in Hong Kong. But by 1998, it was less than 9%. In 1989, only a quarter of the theaters were multiplex or small theaters. In 1998, over 86% were multiplex and small theaters. During this transitional period of the transformation from big theaters to multiplex an interesting phenomenon emerged: the crisscross of art house cinema and mainstream cinema. In the exhibition sector, there were theater owners bringing in foreign art/classic films to the Hong Kong mainstream. Columbia Classic was opened in 1988 and closed in 1997. Its owner Bill Kong emphasized that it was a theater for high-class movies, not for art films. Bill Kong's 1985 interview reveals the general atmosphere of resistance to elitist art in Hong Kong film business. He explained, "In Hong Kong, audience is resistant to art film theaters. They think it will only show 'weird movies'. Art film theaters are not acceptable for general public. I have to make clear that we are not building an art film theater. It is like a while ago the Palace Theater showed a 'Hitchcock Retrospective'. It was successful. It's a balance between arts and commerce." Bill Kong came from a distribution and theater business family. His family distributed foreign films (from Europe, Hollywood and Japan) to Hong Kong. In 2000, he was the mainstay producer who brought *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* to the U.S. mainstream theater. In the production sector, quality commercial films like Wong Kar Wai's directorial debut *As Tear Goes By* (1988) were packaged as mainstream gangster films with the two most bankable and top over-booked stars Maggie Cheung and Andy Lau. John Woo's violence-aesthetic films, shown in Western film festivals, are mainstream in

Hong Kong. Wong Kar Wai is the prime example of a Hong Kong director of commercially viable art film. In the 1990s Hong Kong filmmakers, including art film directors, could work without studio and script, but had to stay within the star and genre prescribed by the financiers.

The exhibition sector played an active part in the development of Hong Kong cinema. As both the financier and the buyer of film products it was the locomotive of the industry, setting the pace and direction for the production sector, laying down the parameters on what and how to produce. The mode of financing and mode of exhibition influenced both the style of filmmaking and style of film text. Hong Kong filmmakers' frantic and spontaneous filmmaking style, and the kinetic and neurotic energy in Hong Kong movies can be attributed to the personal management style in the exhibition sector. Given the significant and driving role of the exhibition sector in the system of Hong Kong cinema, how did the colonial government adeptly discipline the industry and shape it into an apolitical entertainment industry via this sector?

GOVERNMENT AND CENSORSHIP – HONG KONG CINEMA ON PAROLE

In the 1990s, with the euphoric atmosphere boosted by economic achievements and the myth of the government's laissez-faire economic policy, it was believed that even though the government didn't play a protective and supportive role to Hong Kong's cinema, the industry benefitted from the colonial government's benign neglect. This impression intensified especially when compared with situations in neighboring Chinese-language film industries under state control, or with intense government involvement. The Hong Kong film industry was not tied to political or economic power blocs and did

not depend on bank loan financing or state studio approval. Hong Kong filmmakers' spontaneous and frantic filmmaking style further reinforced the illusion of the autonomy of Hong Kong cinema. The vitality of the popular culture, the energy of Hong Kong cinema and the prosperity of the city may have obscured the colonial nature of the administration – Hong Kong was ruled as a colony and the government was not elected to represent the people. The Governing authority of the ruler superseded the freedom of expression of the ruled, and administration expedience superseded the preservation and development of local film culture. The British colonial government officially established film censorship in Hong Kong in the 1950s after regaining Hong Kong from the Japanese. The political censorship clause has been resiliently maintained since then, despite repeated challenges by the local film community. It was only finally dropped in 1995, two years before Hong Kong's sovereignty change. How did the colonial government apply censorship control over the local film industry, and yet present an image of being liberal or even benign? What was the role of the government in the system of Hong Kong cinema? And how did the Hong Kong filmmakers carve out a space for themselves?

The role of the colonial government in the system of Hong Kong cinema was quite peculiar. It was not protective or supportive as in national cinema, nor did it function as a facilitator as in Hollywood. Instead, it added chaos and crisis to the film industry's operations, either by its presence in enforcing censorship rules or by its absence in maintaining law and order and setting film policy. During the transitional period the failure of the lame duck government to instill confidence and project hope

intensified political anxiety. Filmmakers were preoccupied with political issues, and free-floating anxiety was present on the screen, the set and in the industry at large. Not being recognized as an art worth preserving by the society, or as a vital industry worth supporting by the government, Hong Kong cinema was like a street kid under the pressures of parental negligence, discipline by authority, and street violence. It had neither the freedom from government censorship, nor the support to elevate its status and pursuit of any higher goal. With the government setting the political parameters for its production, Hong Kong cinema was in fact on parole. In the name of protecting the citizens, the government applied censorship rules mainly in the exhibition sector, and not the production sector. Hong Kong filmmakers' initial response to censorship rules focused mainly on pragmatic and logistical issues, instead of arguing on principles of fairness or freedom of expression. Over the years, however, they got more creative in their strategies in dealing with the consensus-building British colonial government by invoking public opinion, and setting up a moderate public forum in which to force government officials to have some face time with the public. They were no less skillful and diplomatic than the colonial government in pressing their demands. They developed tactful and flexible resistance approaches well suited for dealing with a colonial government whose rule was described as "velvet colonialism".

The colonial nature of the government in the system of Hong Kong cinema has often been overlooked or misinterpreted. In her study of film censorship in Hong Kong Maria Barbieri succinctly describes that the essence of the system of government in Hong Kong: "a flexible combination of central control from the British Government in London

with local administration by officials reporting to the Governor's office."(92) Despite the euphemism "velvet colonialism", Hong Kong was ruled with an iron fist as a colony first and foremost. Barbieri states, "Hong Kong was essentially a military, diplomatic and trading station, and not an ordinary settlement. Strategic considerations demanded a more stringent control by the British Empire." (92) The highly publicized positive non-intervention policy of the colonial government was a myth. Barbieri poignantly points out its essence: "the real nature of the laissez-faire economic policy in Hong Kong, the lack of intervention by the colonial government was an ideological tool, used to disclaim accountability for social inequality, rather than a coherent policy…the government intervened to favour the generation of wealth rather than its distribution." (64) In the cultural realm there was no coherent policy either. The government that intervened with its censorship system in the name of protecting the citizens was, in reality, more concerned about protecting the governing authority from social protests and disobedience, as well as preventing Hong Kong from being embroiled in China's politics, which was essential for the continuation of British rule over Hong Kong. The colonial government enforced tighter controls on films than on other media, since all films had to go through a censorship procedure and get screening permits from the authorities before any public release, while there was no such requirement on print media. The colonial government never neglected the Hong Kong film industry, as Barbieri points out when describing the significant role of Hong Kong cinema in the political power struggle: "(T)he development of cinema in Hong Kong has been affected since its beginning by its political potential, especially in regard to the changing power relationship with China.

Not only the thematic aspect of movies made in Hong Kong but also the organizational structure of the industry and the market competition within the industry itself are closely related to the struggle for cultural hegemony in the area." (72) Throughout the history of Hong Kong cinema, there was always link between government, politics and the film industry. The very apolitical outlook of Hong Kong entertainment movies is symptomatic of the very political nature of this mass entertainment industry. Situated in a dependent territory, the Hong Kong film industry never enjoyed benign neglect by any ruling regime. But the intricate relationship between filmmakers, major studios and political power blocs in previous eras is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In the decade I focus on, the 1990s, when Hong Kong cinema was facing intensified global competition, there was an obvious relationship between the role of government and Hong Kong cinema's industry structure, filmmaking practices and film style. The industry had to adopt a flexible mode of production and a horizontal organizational structure to enable it to respond quickly not only to volatile overseas markets, but also the changing political climate. Hong Kong cinema was an anomaly in an era when the nation-state was assumed to be the norm, and national cinema was treated as sacrosanct to help it resist Hollywood domination. Despite the appearance of being a market-driven operation the Hong Kong film industry was largely defined by the political structure of the territory, and the governing philosophy of its ruling regime. The Hong Kong film industry had to economically perform (survive by not being a burden to the small government) while remained politically subservient (not damaging the image of the tranquility of colonial rule.) The colonial government significantly molded the industrial structure and affected

the thematic and formal presentation of Hong Kong cinema. The government's action, whether present or absent, played a significant role in the system of Hong Kong cinema. Hong Kong filmmakers responded to the ruling regime's unaccountability by changing their resistance strategies. Over the years they gradually changed their strategy from passive appeal and petition to authority, to positive intervention for change by playing the public opinion card and international law card to take advantage of the transnational status of Hong Kong society, and international media attention focusing on Hong Kong near the days of sovereignty change.

The Presence of the Government

Early incidents of censorship were mainly prompted by overt political reasons and Hong Kong filmmakers were, in general, defenseless vis-à-vis the authorities. In 1936, the Nationalist (KMT) government announced the banning of the production of dialect films in the name of unifying the national language. As Zhou and Li describe, the announcement rocked the entire Hong Kong film industry because it affected the livelihood of Cantonese filmmakers, and sounded the death knell of dialect cinema. Since Hong Kong cinema heavily depended on the Cantonese speaking market in China at that time, Hong Kong filmmakers petitioned the Nationalist government, but only got a temporary suspension of the ban. The incident tailed off when China and later Hong Kong became entangled in the war with Japan. In 1938, *March of the Guerillas* (1938, written by Cai Chusheng) was banned by the Hong Kong government because Britain at that time wanted to stay neutral and did not want any anti-Japanese films shown in Hong Kong. But the ban was lifted in 1941 when Hong Kong was under direct threat from

Japan (110). During the Japanese occupation, Hong Kong filmmakers fled and stopped making films, and the only Cantonese movies shown in theaters were those that had been confiscated and were scheduled by the Japanese occupying force (Zhou and Li). A full scale civil war resumed after the Japanese surrender. The Nationalists lost and retreated to Taiwan. When the Communists took over China and closed its doors, Hong Kong cinema shifted its markets to overseas Chinese. When the Cold War started, the Hong Kong government decided to combat communist propaganda. According to Barbieri, in the 1950s the government summoned and asked local film producers not to produce films that would incite unrest, and decided to establish an unofficial scripts censorship. The administration did not use Hong Kong cinema as a propaganda tool to legitimize its rule or counter its opponent, but no Kino Fist or Cinema Agitate was permitted either. In the post-war years, mainland China's stated film policy was to promote communism; in Nationalist-ruled Taiwan it was countering communism; and in the United States the unstated media policy was "internationalism" (Curtin "Beyond"). To maintain its rule over Hong Kong amidst nationalist movements in Asia, the British had to keep Hong Kong neutral. Political neutrality was the unstated official film policy of the colonial government throughout its history, as we shall see in the censorship battles below. To avoid upsetting the public order, films shown in Hong Kong could not be supportive of communism, anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism from any political direction.

By 1953, an official system of film censorship had been implemented (C.-t. Li "Fatal Blow"). British colonial rule in Asia was seriously challenged in World War II and Hong Kong government had to build social consensus and legitimize its rule by adopting

a softer approach. Films slated for public release had first to be submitted to the censor's office. The stated purpose of censorship system was to protect society from harm. Given that the society was based on a moral consensus, this censorship was a means to protect this moral consensus. But the censorship system in Hong Kong was plagued with problems. The rules, written loosely, were subjected to the censors' personal interpretations and the implementation was inconsistent or even absurd. As Barbieri points out, the system was characterized with a paternalistic attitude, and a general prejudice born out of the colonialist discourse, which discriminated against local films and gave imported films an unfair advantage. The system was racially discriminative, with the censorship authority headed often by a Westerner who decided what was moral and decent for the ruled Chinese community to watch.

Censorship, on political or on social issues, was widely implemented by the ruling cadre to ensure the public would not be incited to unrest. In her research, Barbieri detailed censorship cases to illustrate the breath of the colonial government's censorship and the absurdity of its reasoning. Here is a brief list: in the post-war years it was particularly opposed to China's political propaganda films. Documentaries on the national celebrations of China were banned to avoid "provoking public disorder in Hong Kong cinema" (109) Films like *The East is Red* and *The Great Victory of Mao Zedong's Thought* were cut. *The Opium War* (1967) was banned because "its showing in a public place would damage good relations with other territories." Even films from the city's sovereign United Kingdom were cut or banned after they had been cleared by the censorial authority in Britain (110). In 1970, Patrick Lung's (Lung Kong's) *Yesterday,*

Today and Tomorrow, was accused of depicting an apocalyptic vision of Hong Kong, and was held back by the distributor. Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* was banned on the grounds of "excessive violence and its strong anti-colonialist theme." (112). Akira Kurosawa's *Dersu Uzala* (1975) was banned in Hong Kong in 1977 because it was considered anti-Chinese. *Easy Rider* was banned because "it was not conducive to the well-being of youth because not only did it dwell on the use of drugs, it also seemed to endorse such practices," said Nigel Watt, Commissioner for Television and Films at the time. (112) Watt's cultural relativity reasoning for different censoring measures on sexual and violent material on the Hong Kong screen is particularly revealing of the prejudices inherent in the system. He said, "Chinese audiences in Hong Kong are more ready to accept violence on the screen than they are to accept blatant sex. The minority audience of European or Western people, however, seems to look at the problem the other way round!"(113) With the censor's endorsement it is no coincidence that Hong Kong action cinema gradually excelled in the "violence aesthetic."

Barbieri goes on with censorship cases to illustrate the inherent contradictions and hypocrisy of colonialism in the decisions made by the authorities. The written censorship rule was in fact created more for administrative expedience than for giving the filmmakers a clear guideline of the Do's and Don'ts. Years of censorship had such a stifling effect that Hong Kong filmmakers had turned to costume drama for political allegory, or other creative ways to express their discontent. But as Li Cheuk-to describes, "Although the political system is far from democratic, the British administrators ruled with a liberal hand." (C.-t. Li "Fatal Blow") There was no major reaction provoked from

the filmmakers until the 1980s, when the "1997 issue" started to raise concerns over political censorship and the community's urge to discuss the political issue intensified. In 1980 New Wave director Tsui Hark's controversial film *Dangerous Encounter – 1st Kind* was banned on the grounds of "incitement to crime, violence and anti-social behaviour." (Barbieri 121). Taiwan's anti-Chinese communist films *If I Were For Real* (1980) and *The Coldest Winter in Peking* (1981) were banned on political grounds. In 1981 Ng See Yuan's *Men without a Promised Land* didn't pass the censor even after it was reshot. In 1982, New Wave director Patrick Tam's *Nomad* was approved, re-censored and then re-cut. In the same year, New Wave director Ann Hui's *The Boat People,* a story about Vietnamese people after the Vietcong take-over, produced by a pro-leftist company, passed the censor and was briefly released before it was withdrawn by the distributors due to pressure from the Leftists later.

In an interview in 1982, Ng See Yuen complains about how the censoring practice became disruptive to film business in Hong Kong (C.-t. Li "Ng See Yuen on Censorship"). Prompted by the recent incidents of banning and re-censoring films, Hong Kong filmmakers established "The Hong Kong Film Worker Against Re-censor System Provisional Committee" and Ng See Yuan was one of the five committee members. He had experience in negotiating with the censorship authority and knew the problems of the censorship system well. Ng says, "in fact the Hong Kong filmmaking community is defenseless in face of the censorship authority. It goes without saying that we all know that there is no standard in the censor…What we are really up against this time is not the strictness of the rule…In fact, we are against the unfairness of the re-censor procedure

and rules." ("Ng See Yuen on Censorship" 6) Ng quotes the case of *Nomad* to illustrate how disruptive and costly the re-censorship was to the filmmakers. "This set a bad example for the future. There is no point of getting a screening permit from the authority…according to Hong Kong censorship ordinance, one person or a group has the right to appeal for re-censor or banning a film even after it is approved for public screening. This is problematic. They (the censors) have no idea of film production procedure. Usually after we finished making the movies, we only print one to two copies for the censorship authority to decide to cut or not. After getting the screening permit, we then print more copies, plan release dates with theaters and sign contracts with advertising companies. This will cost us at least 300,000 to 400,000 dollars. For public release, we only need to print 6 to 7 more copies. But in the United States or Japan, they need up to 200 to 300 copies and that costs over one million dollars. But a complaint from one person or one group can have a huge impact and stop the screening of an approved film. This will cause chaos to the business cycle." ("Ng See Yuen on Censorship" 6) The person or the group asking for re-censoring a released film could make an anonymous call and was not responsible for any consequences. Ng vents, "The authority's reason for re-censor is to protect the public's interest…but who protects the interest of the film company? ... their complaint can disrupt or even suspend our business but without taking up any responsibility for our loss. This is very unfair…the suspension of screening can cost us up to 500,000 dollars." ("Ng See Yuen on Censorship" 6) The filmmakers had the right of appeal against the re-censor, but the bureaucracy of the legal procedure could only cost them more time and money. In the same issue of the film

magazine, Hong Kong filmmakers published an open statement against the re-censor rules. What is interesting about this incident is that the focus of the filmmakers' argument was not about the right to freedom of expression or asking for clarity of the rules and regulation. Instead, their concern was more pragmatic: a desire for a more proper censorship procedure to minimize the disruption to the film business, as well as a punishment to deter irresponsible anonymous complainants. Another important point to note is that the filmmakers united and set up a committee to open a channel to communicate with the government, instead of suffering the authority's maltreatment quietly. Hong Kong filmmakers were not stereotypically politically apathetic as the authority or university scholars of that era depicted. This incident stirred up a commotion in the filmmaking community and considerable public discussion. From then on there were more and more articles revealing the problems of the film censorship system and requests for change. In his summary of the activity of Hong Kong film workers opposing the re-censor system, Koo Siu Fung (Stone Koo) points out that up to that time (1983), in this dominantly Chinese society, the film censorship regulations only have an English version and no Chinese version. Subsequently a non-official Chinese version of the regulation (of 1976) was published in the next two issues for concerned readers ("Film Censorship Clause Part 1"; "Film Censorship Clause Part 2"). More and more people from the public arena joined the discussion and published articles in that film magazine.

In 1984, the Film and Broadcasting Bureau suddenly announced that all scripts of stage drama must pass through the censor before a public showing. This shocked the art community (Z. Wei). First of all, since the 1960s, the consensus-building colonial

government used to set up consultation committees to seek public opinion before passing new laws. It was unusual for the government to catch the public by surprise. Secondly, Hong Kong stage drama was still a small circle activity, which could hardly incite widespread public disorder. The news of this incited heated discussion and media workers from various fields to set up a forum on "Creative Freedom of the Repertory Theater". Lam Yik-wah (Edward Lam) of Zuni Icosahedron (an art group) expressively points out the paternalistic attitude of the government in the name of protecting the public (C. You). Interestingly, it is the Bureau's sudden action that prompted workers from film, artists from the stage, and scholars and publishers to gather together to hash out the censorship issue. Political censorship was the key concern in their debate on censorship. As Chan Ching Wai perceptively points out, the censorship was set up to protect the governing authority, not the people. "If that's only for the purpose of protecting the citizen from the harmful conditions of the sex and violent material, existing laws in Hong Kong are effective enough to make filmmakers self-disciplined. There is no need for a system that pre-censors films before they are released." ("Censorship Shackles" 38) The essence of the censorship ordinance was to control rather than to protect the people despite the official rhetoric. Chan Ching Wai continues, "Although the flavor of colonialism is fading in Hong Kong, it is still a genuine colonial government. That is to say, however much it respects the people's opinion it is still not a government that represents the people. Therefore its legislation is not that of the people…the priority of the government legislation is to protect its own governing authority. It will adopt strict control practices to any opposing force." That explained why there was no standard in the

censor and re-censor procedure. Chan Ching Wai laments, "The grounds for banning a film can be on moral, religion, education or anything the authority comes up with." In view of the unchecked power of the censorship authority Chan Ching Wai presciently warns that we should not be over optimistic about the amendment of the regulation in 1984 and sadly he was right. Despite the heated debate among both legislators and industry professionals, the clause on political censorship (banning films which might "damage good relations with other territories") remained in the 1988 amendment too. Such politically conservative practices were extended to the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF), known for showcasing Asian art movies. According to an interview article in Film Bi-weekly titled "Making a Big deal – Why the Hong Kong International Film Festival does not screen Taiwanese films?" HKIFF, despite the geographical and cultural proximity between Hong Kong and Taiwan and the rise of Taiwan New Cinema, did not show Taiwanese films for ten yeas (1976-1987) while other major international film festivals were inviting films from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong for exhibition (Ji). No government official gave the interviewer a direct answer although the political reason was obvious to the decision makers in the festival office.

In 1986, the government decided to amend the film censorship ordinance and it was a closed-door drafting with no industry professionals involved. In June 1986, Film Bi-Weekly and Hong Kong film workers published a public statement in major newspapers expressing their concern and suggesting that the authorities open the draft for public review. Before the filmmakers received any answer, the government announced the "1986 Public Order (amendment) Ordinance" which alarmed the journalism

community, because according to that regulation anyone found spreading false news and causing public panic would be prosecuted. The swing between the tightening and relaxing of public order ordinances since 1967 has always been an issue and concern in Hong Kong.[67] In March 1987, veteran film critic Li Cheuk-to, after a discussion with lawyer friends, found out an outrageous fact: the film ordinance was not legally valid and the censorship system, which operated for more than thirty years, had no legal basis. In his article titled "Questioning the Legality of the Film Censorship System" Li explains that the "film censorship standard guideline" edited by the censorship authority was just an internal executive guideline and not part of the censorship ordinance (C.-t. Li "Questioning"). Without including the censorship standard the ordinance was not legally valid and thus the censorship authority had no legal authority to approve films for screening. In 1987, an article in the Asian Wall Street Journal leaked a confidential government document revealing that the government had known since 1972 that the film censorship system had been operating without legal authority.[68] This confirmed Li Cheuk-to's suspicion. In March 1987, the government openly admitted that it had not set up a legally valid censorship ordinance. In April 1987, Hong Kong filmmakers posted a public statement on Film Bi-Weekly asking the government to explain ("A Statement"). The filmmakers also demanded the government be more open to the public about introducing the new three-tier rating system, and to be clear and precise about the political censorship clause if that could not be canceled. Instead of coming clean and explaining to the public, the colonial government's response to the scandal was: lie and be evasive in its answer and divert the public's attention to the new three tier-rating

system (Nie "Who"). The Head of the censorship authority P. Lebrun straightforwardly states that the three-tier rating system was conceived from the perspective of executive efficiency, i.e. to ensure that the theaters will actually implement the censorship authority's guidance (Nie "Censorship Bil"). The government had already discussed the three-tier rating system for more than ten years and it was only after the outbreak of the scandal that it suddenly rushed to pass the bill to give the censorship authority legal power to approve films again. As Barbieri describes, "The new bill was designed to plug all the loopholes (of the previous ordinance) and recommend a film classification system, while preserving the feature of the existing censorship system, including the sensitive clause on political censorship." (96) In the late 1980s with its economic achievements, Hong Kong was a world class city opened to international information with a well-educated labor force attentive to international news, trends and standards. In an article published in May 28, 1987, Li Cheuk-to brought another bomb. He pointed out that the political censorship clause violated the freedom of expression portion in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (C.-t. Li "Political Censorship Violates"). Although Britain is a member of the Covenant, the political clause survived intact in the 1984 amendment. In 1988, the clause survived again and was only tempered by including the obligation for the censors to take into account Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In 1995, two years before Hong Kong was returned to China, the political clause was finally dropped.

The absent government

In the 1990s, the eleventh hour democratic reforms by the last governor were not extended to the culture industry. Despite using Hong Kong cinema for promoting trade and tourism, the colonial government made no effort in supporting local culture industry. The lack of a film policy and guarantees of constitutional rights of freedom of expression left the industry to continue to operate like an illegitimate business, vulnerable to police harassment and triad violent threats. The tax-paying Hong Kong filmmakers did not enjoy the same rights to legal protection and government facilitation as other businesses and industries. The colonial government did not try to balance the tension between governmental efficiency and upholding the principle of freedom of expression.

In mid-1990s, when the Hong Kong film industry was plagued with all ills, there were calls for government involvement. In 1994, four film and culture organizations set up four forums to push the government to get involved and set up a long term development policy for the industry. The topics of the forums were government policy and film censorship, the Hong Kong International Film Festival, the Hong Kong Film Archive and the Hong Kong Film Development Council. The purpose of the forums was to "get more people involved in open discussion so as to provide a reference for government and civil groups to develop a blue print for future development." The summaries of the forums and news clips were published in the book In Search of Hong Kong Film Policy (Zuni). The forums exposed not only the notorious censorship issues to the public, but also the problems caused by an absent government in the film Festival, film archive and film development council. Without the government's leadership role,

these organizations were just muddling through, and ran into chaos and crisis. The film festival was severely understaffed and suffered from the bureaucracy of the civil service system. The film archive was short of resources and its operation was unclear to even its consultants. The film development council project was once canceled.

In the forum on government policy and film censorship, it was interesting to note how straightforward and sometimes even blunt the government officials were in holding their stances. Since the late 1980s, Hong Kong filmmakers had been worrying that the clause on political censorship ("damage the good relationship with other territories"), would be used by the Chinese government after 1997 to tighten control on the industry. In 1994, Martin Lee, head of the Democratic Party, proposed to cancel or amend the political censorship clause, and it provoked a great reaction from the Chinese side because that involved China's foreign relationships and Hong Kong's cultural management after 1997. The Chief Secretary, Anson Chan's[69] response was interesting especially being the second highest ranked government official. She said amending the film censorship clause did not involve foreign policy issues after 1997, and the Hong Kong government seldom invoked the authority from this clause. In the past, the aforementioned clause was invoked only once. Therefore, to her it was no big deal to amend or cancel this clause now (Zuni 14). This was typical of the style of the colonial administration: strict legislation and liberal execution. The government reserved the right to invoke the law to discipline the public at will. The response and reasoning from the Chinese side, Wu Weili of the Xinhua Agency, was also interesting. His argument against canceling the clause is that this clause has already existed for a long time and thus should

be preserved. He further elaborated that letting films that "damage the good relationship with other territories" shown can affect the relationship between Hong Kong and its neighboring countries after 1997. This meant it involved China's foreign relations and thus the central government had to intervene. Both focused on administrative expedience. Neither side argued on the principle of freedom of expression for the Hong Kong people.

It is also interesting to note that as we see in the 1980s, Hong Kong filmmakers, caught between the colonial and Chinese officials, learned to be more and more pragmatic and effective in their approach in negotiating with governments. They became more proactive in film policy issues (albeit mainly limited in the area of film censorship) and started to get government to respond to their demands (albeit limited to minor changes in ordinance). In the 1990s, Hong Kong filmmakers took one more step forward by getting government officials involved in an open forum providing direct face to face communication between filmmakers and government officials in the presence of the public. Peter Lam (Lam Yuk-wah) says his purpose of organizing the forums was to collect opinions from various fields and write them into reports and send them to the government. He says he learned this strategy of negotiating with the government from the experienced art group Zuni Icosahedron (Zuni 8). In this open city of the information age under the world media's watchful eyes as Hong Kong approached 1997, the colonial government couldn't use bullets to subdue people as in an authoritarian country. The Hong Kong citizens couldn't cast ballots to express their opinion as in a democracy. In this peculiar city, communication and negotiation between government and the people got creative. Since the 1960s the colonial government had relied on consultative

committees to seek public opinion in order to legitimize its rule. Over the years, the filmmakers and other cultural organizations learned that the effective way to make the aloof colonial government listen, budge and change was to use the same tool: play the public opinion card. They invoked the power of the people by setting up committees to collect people's opinions, organize popular forums, and kindle public response with open statements and inviting debates. In Hong Kong, the government could not use bullet and the people had no ballot. Creating popular forums was an effective way to improve communication. On and off the screen, the Hong Kong cinema served as an important cultural forum to voice the people's concerns, hopes and fears.

Cinema of anxiety

The history of censorship in Hong Kong reveals that the stated cultural issues are in fact displaced political issues. The banning of political films, imported or local productions were small in number compared with the severe measures taken in neighboring China's film industries. Nonetheless, the enforcement of political censorship since the 1950s has had a stifling effect and set the parameters for the industry. The prosperity of the industry may obscure its conditioning effect on filmmakers over the years. In the 1990s, filmmakers from the most commercial to the most artistic, were all preoccupied with Hong Kong's political issues.

Even though Hong Kong cinema was not a national cinema, the Hong Kong colonial government, whether present or absent, played an important role in creating the market-driven system, shaping the industry organizational structure and molding an apolitical mass entertainment. It switched to a soft governing approach after 1960s. Its

approach in controlling the film industry was so soft and inconspicuous that its relationship with the local film industry has been mistaken as benign neglect, which might have paradoxically helped promote Hong Kong's image as a modern liberal city despite its status as a colony. The filmmakers' dealings with the government gradually became also more flexible and pragmatic. While the colonial government has used a closed-door operating style for the last one and a half centuries, contemporary Hong Kong filmmakers and critics have insisted on making public statements, setting up public forums and gathering public opinion. As Hong Kong cinema became more spread out in the world market, such a soft, pragmatic and flexible approach was also practiced in the production sector by the producers and production executives who were mostly women and were fondly addressed as "housekeeper." What was the role of the producer in the system of Hong Kong cinema? Why were production executives mostly women in the 1990s? How was their management style different from that of their counterparts in the previous era or in Hollywood?

PRODUCER: HOUSEKEEPER OF HONG KONG CINEMA

In the 1990s, Hong Kong cinema seemed to regress to a cottage industry comprised of independent productions known for its filmmakers' frantic work style. [70] In the production sector it looked more like guerilla filmmaking than a modern movie business. In the previous era the integrated Shaw studio was regarded as a symbol of the modern film industry in Asia. Interestingly, in the 1990s parallel to the de-integration of the film industry, there was the rise of the position of producers, and 70% of the Hong Kong production executives were women. If a woman occupying an executive position is

a sign of progress and a producer cinema is a symbol of the modern movie business, then Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s was more advanced than the previous studio era which recruited no women in production and had the directors, instead of the producers, as the centers of power and creative control. What was the role of the producer in the system of Hong Kong cinema? Why in the 1990s, were production executives mostly women? How was their management style different from that of their counterparts in the previous era or in Hollywood?

In Hong Kong cinema, woman producers were often fondly addressed as "the housekeepers," the matriarch figure in charge of administration. On the one hand, this exploited women's traditional gender role as the multi-tasking caretaker. On the other hand, it capitalized on modern women's leadership role as executives. Producers of Hong Kong cinema experienced the intriguing power dynamic of an industry going through the double edges of colonialism, capitalism, and globalism. The history of the Hong Kong film industry does not fit into a linear development model. It is not a mechanical imitation of the Hollywood studio system model, and the role of the producer is not a simple replica of their counterparts in Hollywood. Within Hong Kong cinema's specific political, economic and cultural parameters, producers modify and adapt their roles to local socio-cultural contexts, industry organization structures and across various team chemistries. Like the housekeeper in a family, the producer played a significant, all-round, supportive role beyond that which a simple job specification could describe. The rising of the producer position and increasing participation of women at the executive rank cannot be easily read as either progress or regression of the industry. The case of

Hong Kong producer shows the inadequacy of existing theories and methodologies to conceptualize industrial models and professional positions situated in Hong Kong's particular cultural contexts. At present, the few studies on Hollywood women producers often define the gender issue as a woman's issue and overlook the economic realities of American corporate culture. Studies of the Hollywood studio system often frame the producer-function as an economic issue and overlook the socio-cultural factors in shaping the organizational structure and the producer's role in such a system. In this segment, in order to understand the role of producer in Hong Kong cinema, I would contextualize the system of Hong Kong cinema in the world market and situate the producer within the system of Hong Kong cinema. The recruitment of women producers in the Hong Kong film industry is in congruence with the pattern of Overseas Chinese business and the Hong Kong style of management of drawing from traditional cultural practice to adapt to the modern global business environment in the rapidly growing East Asian region. While in some studies of Hollywood, where expansion is often equated with growth, the adaptive flexible practice of Hong Kong cinema could easily be mistaken as a dysfunctional maladjustment. The management style of this generation of producers, women or the younger generation of collaborative males, best illustrates the Hong Kong film industry's survival strategy: by being adaptive, pragmatic and flexible in order to keep making movies.

Studies on Woman Producers in Hollywood

By referencing the studies on women producers in Hollywood, we can better see the peculiarity of the case of the Hong Kong producer: the dynamic relationship between

the role of the producer and the organizational structure of the industry. So, it is worthwhile to discuss briefly the Hollywood studio system and the handful of written sources on woman producers in Hollywood before going on to the case of Hong Kong women producers. In Hong Kong there is neither scholarly study nor many newspaper or magazine articles on producers, not to mention any focus on the gender dimension of this profession. At present Hollywood is the most dominant film industry in the world and its industrial model is the most extensively studied in the academy. It has also experienced the rise of women executives. In 2002, Jess Cagle in her magazine article, "The women who run Hollywood" featuring Stacey Snider, Sherry Lansing, and Amy Pascal, states that "for the first time in history, women are now running half of the six major movie studios." (44) However, despite such an event's groundbreaking historical significance, there is still little literature on Hollywood women producers about their roles in the studio system, on how they break into the old boys' club, and on how their management style differs from their male counterparts or the impact of women's leadership on the organizational structure of Hollywood. Even with the tremendous amount of research in disciplines like gender, business management, and the Hollywood studio system, there are few that integrate theories from these disciplines and analyze the role of women executives in Hollywood. Nevertheless, the sparse sources available still serve as good references for studying Hong Kong producers and exploring how these issues may be conceptualized, framed, and reframed.

The early literature on Hollywood women filmmakers are often more like political manifestos of gender equality than a pragmatic recognition of economic realities.

Ally Acker in Reel Women – Pioneers of the Cinema 1896 to the Present argues that women had a strong presence in the beginning but gradually faded out in the mainstream and in history. Despite her intention to redeem women's history, in the chapter on women producers Acker perceives women producers and Hollywood as unchanging. In the biographical description, Acker repeats the stereotypical and binary types of powerful women such as the non-threatening nice girl Sherry Lansing versus the masculine Dawn Steel. Dawn B. Sova in Women in Hollywood – From Vamp to Studio Head also argues that women filmmakers had a strong start and could meet their male counterparts on equal ground. She describes women's on again off again relationship with the Hollywood system. In the 1930s and 1940s once formal structures were established to determine roles and to set standards, women were pushed out of the high-power jobs. Then in the 1980s women were restored to positions of power such as studio head, producer and director. But these women often created new enterprises and remained outside of the mainstream of power. Then in the 1990s women invaded the existing enterprises and assumed decision-making roles at major studios. But Sova does not explain why the Hollywood studio system that pushed women out in the 1930s and 1940s would admit women back in the 1980s and 1990s when the New Hollywood global conglomerates, as Schatz describes, were ever more structured and blockbuster-obsessed and "the production and calculated reformulation of these blockbuster films into multimedia franchises has become more systematic." ("Return" 76) She does not analyze the changes in the structure of Hollywood and how women took advantage of that to penetrate into the system. She does not elaborate on the relationship between gender and the

organizational structure and industrial system. Acker and Sova inform us of women's presence in the industry but do not help us understand objective changes in the industry or the subjective experiences of the women.

With the assumption that to be equal means to be the same, the goal of getting women into a position of power becomes a common view of gender equality. But in an industry like Hollywood sexism is the elephant in the room and there is tremendous pressure on women to keep quiet about their gender issues. Sherry Lansing has been quoted on many occasions for denying prejudice against women, and having insisted that talent is the only criteria in this creative industry. Stacey Snider, who declined the Cagle interview, is "like many other younger women working in Hollywood, …[who] resists being labeled a 'female executive' or drawing attention to her gender." (46) Culture is a salient issue for analyzing gender relations and organizations, because organizational cultures like that of Hollywood have been significant barriers to change. The informal organization may transmit cultural messages about the "proper place" for women. Popular book writers or writers with high-ranking industry experience are more perceptive and offer more practical advice. In her popular book on career advice for women Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office Lois P. Frankel acknowledges sex discrimination as a real part of a woman's employment experience, but warns women not to file complaints via formal channels or verbalize any concerns openly because it may backfire. She also advises women not to change the system alone or play the gender card without exploring other alternatives. Even though she advises women to 'quit being a girl,' she also strongly advises against women acting like a man.[71] One can imagine the

daunting task facing women executives in Hollywood, a paradoxical industry: while creativity and breaking the rules are exalted, there are many more tenacious secret rules than written ones. Gail Evans, an executive vice president of CNN, in Play Like A Man, Win Like A Woman, who is also encouraging women to adapt to the "malestream" but to succeed on female terms, provides a concrete description of the structure of American media industries, and explores the unwritten rules in business and lists the usual traps women fall into in such a structure. She points out the importance for women to be industry-savvy, i.e. to be aware that the rules are written by men and the structure of the playing field is traditionally shaped like a pyramid. This point is particularly important to the study of the Hong Kong producer, even though the structure of the playing field in Hong Kong cinema was drastically different from the pyramid structure of Hollywood. Evans says sometimes a woman fails not because she lacks good ideas, but "because she lost sight of the fact that a good idea isn't more powerful than the structure that must approve it." (40) Evans goes further to urge women to change the system communally, to stay in the mainstream and change the system from the inside out, instead of finding a voice outside the system.[72]

However, this is much easier said than done. When a woman faces hostile cultures, she has to spend a tremendous amount of energy just to develop strategies for her own survival. Lynda Obst, one of the most successful producers who survived Hollywood for two decades, in her autobiographical survival guide Hello, He Lied – And Other Truths from the Hollywood Trenches illustrates the pragmatism of woman producers. Despite her humorous tone, one can still sense the gravity and the pressure

woman executives face. Nevertheless, Obst manages to define success in her terms, "My goal has been to learn how to get movies made without losing sight of the reason I began. I have had to learn to recognize the insidious nature of the beast without becoming one." (8) Rachel Abramowitz's Is That A Gun In Your Pocket – Women's Experience of Power in Hollywood based on extensive research and interviews, written in a novelistic style, vividly presents the lived experience of woman executives struggling to assimilate. With back stories of parents, spouses, friends and associates around the women executives, one can imagine how hard these women have fought when they could not even verbalize sexism and there was no rosy female-bonding in this colony. The call for more fluid gender roles - for both men and women - in the business world is echoed in Linda Seger's When Women Call the Shots – the Developing Power and Influence of Women in Television and Film. Seger also observes that for the first wave of women executives in the 1980s, the pressure to assimilate to the "malestream" was enormous. But she is optimistic that the new wave of women executives in the 1990s, even though mostly still in middle management, will gradually "trickle up" as the industry evolves. This generation of women executives reenvisions business by redefining success. While traditional definitions of power depend on competition with the result dividing winners and losers, for the younger generation women executives "power" is about getting the job done, about empowerment, and to be in a position of power is to be very clear about how one feels about things, etc. Seger then compares the competitive model (usually associated with masculine qualities) and the collaborative model (usually associated with feminine qualities) and suggests that the collaborative model "seems the most conducive

to women, and may be the most conducive to the film industry." (62) She reasons that a competitive attitude can work directly against the goal of producing great films. The building up of the individual ego is detrimental to a positive working environment, and competition can waste time and be counterproductive when an inordinate amount of time is spent on corporate politics, etc. The collaborative model can be more efficient because it removes internal competition, removes the need for politicking, and promotes strategic and creative thinking. Seger goes on to state that the effectiveness of the collaborative model is gradually becoming appreciated by the new generation of men working under female bosses. Seger's collaborative model is echoed by producer and professor Myrl A. Schreibman, in his Creative Producing From A to Z – The Indie Producer's Handbook. Schreibman points out that the two most important concepts in independent production are "relationship" and "ego". This indicates the significance of collaboration in a flattened organizational structure like independent production and producer, where the executive, regardless of his or her gender, plays an important role in creating and maintaining an amicable work ambience. As the New Hollywood conglomerates focus more on investing in people who make films, rather than making films in-house as in the classical era, the role of entrepreneurs become more important to the process. Together with the outsourcing of financial planning, marketing and script consultation to small businesses, the structure of the American film industry is a complex mix of the pyramid and flat organization structures.

Studies outside Hollywood and American corporate culture are most relevant to the study of the producer in the system of Hong Kong cinema in terms of organizational

structure and the functions of women executives. Sally Helgesen and Carol R. Frenier, instead of urging women to assimilate to the "malestream," look for female advantages and call for changes in organizational structures. They reframe the gender issue as a business issue, instead of a women's issue. They illustrate how it makes economic sense to have woman leaders. Helgesen, in The Female Advantage – Women's Ways of Leadership, finds that women are best at running organizations that foster creativity, cooperation, and intuitive decision-making power. In her documentation of the everyday practices of woman entrepreneurs, she notices how her subjects' experience as women (wives, mothers, friends, sisters, daughters) contributes to their leadership style. The women entrepreneurs "tended to structure their companies as networks or grids instead of hierarchies, which meant that information flowed along many circuits, rather than up and down in prescribed channels." (28) The organizations run by these women do not take the form of the traditional hierarchical pyramid, but more closely resemble a web. The women's concern with relationships necessitates the impulse to share information, and sharing "was also facilitated by their view of themselves as being in the center of things rather than at the top; it's more natural to reach *out* than to reach *down*." (27) Under female leadership the community is created around a central purpose. As we shall see, the organization of the Hong Kong film industry of the 1990s is closer to Helgesen's web structure, and woman producers, situated at the center of the web, played an important role in the efficiency of information flow, pulling cast and crew together, and maintaining this tightly-knit filmmaking community. Similarly, Carol Frenier, an entrepreneur and media producer, in Business and the Feminine Principle – the Untapped Resource, also

proposes to explore the feminine side of our nature to transform our business environment. She explores feminine patterns of work and the feminine principles. Her notion of feminine leadership is one that collaborates with the masculine, and appreciates the value of combining the feminine and masculine ways of thinking.

Acker and Sova, appealing to the moral of gender equality, state how things should be. Frankel and Evans, being practical and pragmatic, explain how things can be in the given American corporate culture. Obst and Abramowitz, with first-hand experience or interview and research, show how things feel like in candid detail. Seger and Schreibman, when comparing the collaborative and competitive models, or contrasting studio and indie productions, call for gender fluidity. Helgesen and Frenier, researching beyond Hollywood and American corporate culture, reframe the gender issue and extol female advantages and feminine principles. In Hollywood, women executives have adapted to be gender bilingual, that is assuming both masculine traits such as ambition, assertiveness and competence, and feminine traits such as caring, nurturing and connectedness. Helgesen and Frenier's vision of female leadership and changing industrial structure may still seem far-fetched in Hollywood, but is a closer description of the phenomenon in Hong Kong cinema where women were invited, not for moral reasons of gender equality, but for the economic benefits they brought to an industry going through seismic structural changes in a different socio-cultural context. It is from an economic perspective – the producer's core job being about the bottom line – that we start to better understand why in Hong Kong women were invited into the film industry

and how producers, men and women, functioned in the changing organizational culture and industrial structure.

Producer-function in Hollywood studio system

In Hollywood studio system studies there is the assumption that the function of the producer in the studio system hinges on centralization. Thus, the role of American socio-cultural context in shaping the Hollywood organizational structure is overlooked. For example, Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson in Classical Hollywood Cinema and Thomas Schatz in "The return of the Hollywood studio system" argue, from the central producer system, to the producer-unit system of the classical era, to later New Hollywood's conglomeration, the different systems are merely a revision of the principal of centralization of the Hollywood studio system because the studios either retained centralized physical facilities and labor, or maintained the pivotal sectors of financing and distribution. Bordwell et al. pay no attention to human agency in the big capitalist machine, and Schatz pays no attention to the return of women studio heads in the return of the Hollywood studio system. It is not a surprise that David Bordwell in Planet Hong Kong makes no attempt to theorize the system of Hong Kong cinema despite he and his associates' established work on Hollywood. Hong Kong's film industry being mysterious to him reveals the inadequacy of the theories and methodologies of their model to comprehend production in a different socio-cultural context and to recognize the role of producer in the process. In Genius of the System, Thomas Schatz conceptualizes the filmmaking process in the classical era in very masculine terms, "…studio filmmaking was less a process of collaboration than of negotiation and struggle – occasionally

approaching armed conflict" (*Genius* 12) and his study of human agency covers no gender dimension. Nevertheless, his insight about the melding of institutional force and personal expression brings out the concept of institutional authorship,[73] a different way of thinking about the producer's role in the creative process. The producer, often dismissed as the interfering administrator on the side of the bankers, in Schatz's interpretation is creatively constructive to the making of movies, and this can be used to explain the impact of women producers on the style of Hong Kong cinema. Timothy Corrigan in "The Commerce of Auteurism" (Corrigan) illustrates the distinctive auteur persona of director-producers such as Francis Coppola, and how the author is constructed by and for commerce. However, Matthew Bernstein argues that a TV producer like Jerry Bruckheimer cannot be considered an auteur, but as a brand name he can facilitate the contemporary auteurs' work. In Hong Kong cinema, the producer, not positioned in a vertical relationship with the director, is neither auteur nor brand name. But he or she did contribute greatly in the creative process, and played a key role in facilitating the auteurs' career. For example, director John Woo's producer Terrance Chang plays a key role in launching Woo's career in Hollywood. Director Tsui Hark's producer Nansun Shi played a key role in maintaining their production house, and keeping projects from falling apart for a quarter of a century, an impressive accomplishment given the usual short lifespan of Hong Kong production companies. John Caldwell in Production Culture proposes an integrated cultural-industrial method of analysis, i.e. to integrate cultural analysis with political economic frameworks. He shows how TV producers at the top display a frat-boy image and repress their elitist background in an American TV cultural context. This is

useful for understanding the cultural factor for women being invited into the film industry, and where they were positioned. Caldwell also proposes "theorizing from the ground up" which is not applicable to the Hong Kong film industry because of the Hong Kong film industry's flat organization structure. But I would situate the producer within the system in order to study how the producer worked at the center in a web-like structure instead of at the top of the pyramid.

Housekeeper of Hong Kong Cinema

If Hollywood women producers are male impersonators with a gun in the pocket, and poach power from men at the apex of the pyramid, Hong Kong woman producers are "the housekeepers," an unofficial title that bespeaks of their position as the supportive maternal administrator in a web-like communal structure. They have extended their role from controlling the strings of the family purse and holding the family together, to controlling the budget and schedule, pulling the cast and crew together, as well as cultivating and maintaining relationships with overseas financiers and distributors. There was a "proper place" already saved for her, like in a family business, with the dual-department structure, usually with the male director leading the creative department and the woman producer heading the production executive department. While Hollywood women producers are described as crashing into the boys' club without invitation, Hong Kong women producers were invited by men who felt the need for women to fill the vacancy. While Hollywood women producers suppress their gender, Hong Kong women producers foreground theirs as a matriarch. Understanding the socio-political context that

facilitated the economic empowerment of women, as well as the industrial context of Hong Kong cinema that drew women into this industry and this profession would help.

The Hong Kong film industry in the 1990s, being much smaller in scale and material resources, with about one thousand active members and a relatively flat organization structure, was the opposite of Hollywood. In this small community there was no trade journal for industry news, and the filmmakers relied more on the honor system than formal organizational rules or legal codes. Power was much diffused and information flowed via informal channels which the producers called "gossip."[74] This was closer to Helgensen and Frenier's vision of an organizational structure which facilitated female leadership. Women producers were expected to play a complementary and supportive role to the director, and relied more on intuition than on formulated organizational and workflow charts. They played an important role in creating an ambience in the work place that was conducive to creativity and efficiency. This coincides with producer Rita Fung's assertion that the most important job for a producer in Hong Kong is managing interpersonal relationships.[75] As Frenier describes, her accomplishment in business often is "something that was outside of the usual measuring systems" her tasks seemed almost invisible to everyone (21). Maria Tong comments that being a producer is quite a thankless job, because when the production runs smoothly no one will notice the producer's contributions and hard work, but when she fails, everyone notices.[76] In Hong Kong while the directors receive public recognition, the role of the producer is seriously underrated. In the Hong Kong film industry, the producer, man or woman, had to have both the masculine qualities of assertiveness and decisiveness, as

well as feminine qualities of modesty and diplomacy to lead the team with an iron fist in a velvet glove.

Since its inception, Hong Kong cinema was a commercial, transnational and de-politicized mass entertainment industry. With the government's rhetoric of the "positive non-intervention" policy, small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs), more flexible in absorbing economic fluctuations, composed half of Hong Kong's enterprises. These SMEs had been the backbone of Hong Kong's economic growth for the past few decades, and many were family businesses. In the 1990s, the Hong Kong film industry, with most of its film companies being of small to medium scale, was part of this SMEs culture. It was not only flexible at the level of production, but also in its industrial structure. It had no lasting studio or production house and its history is characterized by an alternation between the studio system and independent productions. In the early 1980s when the traditional markets (Southeast Asia) were seriously shrinking, the Hong Kong film industry had to aggressively explore new overseas markets while the Hollywood domination in Asian markets was increasing. The industry gradually de-integrated to lower overhead costs and started run-away productions in China and other Asian countries to lower production costs. As the Hong Kong economy took off in the late 1970s, the domestic market was too small to support the rising production costs. When market share guaranteed by monopoly or oligopoly practice faded, the pressure to depend on overseas markets increased. As Hong Kong cinema expanded its overseas markets, the bottom-line concerns such as cost-efficiency, market viability, and financial planning

became more prominent, and the demand for a producer who could balance business and the creative dimensions of this culture industry increased.

As the Hong Kong economy transformed from a manufacturing to a service industry, the colonial government needed better-educated laborers, regardless of gender. The free general education policy and civil service system were designed to train English-speaking laborers for tertiary industries like financing, communication, tourism, etc.. Education was made accessible to girls, and Hong Kong soon boasted a high percentage of women entrepreneurs and executives. But the rise of women to economic power was no rosy picture. For woman producers active in the 1990s, growing up in Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s was as far from sugar and spice as Frankel's version of American girlhood during the same decades. In Hong Kong, young girls were forced to grow up fast and help out the parents. While in Frankel's description girls in the U.S. were denied participation in competitive games, Hong Kong girls were forced to work and compete in the real world for survival. Child labor and factory girls working in sweatshops were common in the 1960s. Financial literacy, instead of the bliss of ignorance, was encouraged and required to survive in a post-war refugee colonial society designated to contribute financially to its sovereign power. In the 1950s and 1960s, child actresses like Josephine Siao and child singers like Anita Mui (1963-2003) "quitted being a girl" and worked professionally at the age of five to support the family. Siao became one of the biggest stars in the 1960s Cantonese cinema and later re-invented herself as a director-producer. She was still active, played leading roles and won best actress award in Berlin and various international film festivals in the 1990s. Mui, the diva of Hong Kong

Cantopop of the 1980s and 1990s, was respectfully addressed as the "Big Sister," a powerful nearly-matriarchal figure in the music industry. Even for someone like powerful producer Nansun Shi coming from a better-off background, there was no over-protected girlhood. "Nansun" means born in the south, indicative of the itinerant life of her formative years. In the unstable mid-1960, Shi was sent alone to South Africa by her father to attend a class with children coming from half a dozen countries (Cindy S.C. Chan *Nansun Shi*). Shi later went to the U.K. for a college education in a competitive emerging field, computer science: rare even for Hong Kong boys at that time. Besides political turbulence and social unrest, for that generation of filmmakers, constant migration also contributed to an unstable childhood environment, which extended into their adult lives. Many of them migrated from China or Southeast Asia, briefly settled in Hong Kong, went for an overseas education, migrated mostly to English-speaking countries because of concerns over the 1997 turnover, and then returned to Hong Kong because of the economic boom in the 1990s. In the age of globalization, overseas experience became an asset to executive leaders in the Hong Kong film industry serving a diverse market.

Girlhood was no less brutal and competitive than boyhood in such a society in that era. It did not necessarily get more liberating when girls grew into womanhood even after gaining economic power. In her ethnographic study of women entrepreneurs in Hong Kong, Priscilla Pue Ho Chu concludes that the motivation and reason women were often pushed to set up their business was to provide extra income for the family, or to help out the husbands' or fathers' business. It was rarely motivated by the women's own

ambition or for her own good. Unlike their counterparts in Hollywood, Hong Kong women producers entered the industry without a vision to break into the boy's club or an ambition to get to the top. Producer Chung Chun entered the Shaw studio by answering a newspaper advertisement, not knowing that they had never had women working in production before (Cindy S.C. Chan *Chung Chun*). Chung switched her job because she was bored with her clerical job in shipment. Producer Jessinta Liu switched her job from taming sea lions in the Hong Kong Ocean Park to leading the production team in the movie business (Cindy S.C. Chan *Jessinta Liu*). Nansun Shi was invited to join the fledging Cinema City in the early 1980s while she was dating Tsui Hark, their star director. The men inviting her only knew that they needed a woman in their company as they expanded. They didn't even know what the job title and specifications were, but called the post "housekeeper," assuming it to be self-explanatory (Cindy S.C. Chan *Nansun Shi*). Nansun Shi, a veteran public speaker appearing on radio and TV shows, jokingly and humbly described her job as a "translator" – to translate negative unpleasant words between colleagues and partners into agreeable ones. Her sense of humor probably makes her a survivor. "Whatever hardship we are facing now, it will be good material for jokes in the future," she said as she described the early struggling years in Cinema City. In that interview for the Hong Kong Film Archive, supposed to be formal and serious, Shi filled it with jokes and laughter while delivered the hard data and information we needed. Unlike their Hollywood counterparts, Hong Kong woman producers just acted like they belonged, with no pressure to assimilate. It was for economic reasons that women were included in or excluded from this industry. For example, in the 1990s,

women writers were admitted to Tsui Hark's writer group with the intention of widening the market appeal of Tsui's masculine martial arts films.[77] The most obvious change and impact was the insertion of the romance plot in *Once Upon A Time in China* series (Tsui 1991-1994).

In the production executives department women were very welcome. Lorraine Ho, chair of the Hong Kong Production Executive Association, comments about the inconvenience and interruption of production caused by the previous generation of male producers, who often put their egos before their projects (Cindy S.C. Chan "Lorraine Ho"). Ho praises women for their skill in negotiation and smoothing things out, an ultra important skill in Hong Kong's tight schedule tight budget productions. While praising the women's problem-solving oriented attitude, she referred to the creative department as "the zoo," where the problem-making wild things are.[78] The director and his team often make every day a crisis management day for the production executives by constantly improvising on the set. Like other women producers, Ho also has a good sense of humor and fills her personal interview with jokes and laughter.[79] As we shall see in the case studies, the division of labor along gender lines is best exemplified by the Film Workshop, a production house established by Tsui Hark and Nansun Shi, with Tsui as the director and Shi as the producer, and the couple acted like parental figures in the company, as described by their staff (Ho *Sharon Hui*). While Tsui operated in the typical masculine style of being competitive and goal-oriented (Cindy S.C. Chan "Tsui Hark"),[80] Shi was there not only to take care of the marketing and administration, but also establishing and mending relationships.[81]

Sometimes the partnership is a male-male pair and their roles are switched when they move across different systems. For example, in their Hong Kong productions in the 1980s and early 1990s, producer Terrence Chang usually played the diplomat role to smooth things out, while director John Woo was the *enfant terrible* insisting on a director's artistic integrity. But when they worked in Hollywood in the mid-1990s, John Woo played the good cop and Terrence Chang played the assertive aggressive producer (Cindy S.C. Chan "Terance Chang"). With Hong Kong cinema moving from the studio era to independent production in the 1980s and 1990s, there was also the emergence of a new generation of "the collaborative males." Director-producer Gordon Chan named his production house *People* because he cared about interpersonal relationships and wanted to have a positive and mutually respectful working environment. Gordon Chan is gentle looking, even though he has produced acclaimed movies with titles like *Beast Cop* (Chan, G. 1998). He laments that in the past there was a hierarchy, and workers at the bottom, such as the extras, were often treated like subalterns (Cindy S.C. Chan "Gordon Chan"). Director-producer Peter Chan, who also worked in the studio era, criticizes the chain of command and tight control over creative team (Cindy S.C. Chan "Peter Chan"). In the mid-1990s he founded the co-op like production house *UFO* (United Film Organization) with four other friends in the industry. Peter Chan, also a gentle looking man, was the only non-action movie Hong Kong director sojourning in Hollywood. In the new millennium he founded the pan-Asian coproduction company *Applause*. This generation of flexible "collaborative males" of Hong Kong cinema with their experiences in the systems of the old Shaw studio, Hong Kong production of the 1980s and 1990s as well as

Hollywood productions, are now making their move in China where the film industry is also going thorough rapid changes.

While there is a clear division of labor along gender lines and a prescribed place for women executive in Hong Kong productions, it seems that it is difficult for people (especially men) without a clear gender role to occupy an executive position in this Chinese filmmaking community.[82] There are some other unwritten rules from the past practice of the Chinese opera troupe system that may sound absurd to outsiders. For example, in certain teams, women, regardless of their power and rank, are completely forbidden to sit on the crew's tool-box. Besides gender as a marker for one's "proper place," seniority is also a license to certain powers. For example, on one visit to a set, I was told that a certain light-man is well respected in the industry just because he had worked in this field for a long time.[83] Seniority, loyalty, and honesty are all valued in this organizational culture. Such gender and seniority role assignments might come from the Confucian social order, dictating the proper places for "everyone" (ruler and the ruled, father and son, men and women, elderly and junior etc.) except gays and lesbians. Mother Power occupies a prominent position in the Confucian social order, and more research is needed to confirm this association. Without breathing the traditional local business culture and understanding the specific political, economic, and social historical context of this industry, it is hard for an "outsider" to understand or get a foothold in this industry. For example, Philip Lee, though being a Chinese and speaking the local language, but trained professionally in Japan and the U.S., avoided bringing a lawyer with him during the negotiation stage of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee

2000) when he sensed the informal atmosphere and different practices of the Hong Kong filmmaking community (Cindy S.C. Chan "Philip Lee"). Traditional Chinese cultural values and practices play an important role in shaping the organizational structure and business practice of this industry. Drawing from tradition, and adapting to the modern international business environment, Hong Kong enterprises have developed a distinctive business model and distinctive style of management.

Overseas Chinese business model and Hong Kong style management

The Hong Kong film industry, being part of the larger Hong Kong economy, was operated like many Overseas Chinese businesses: with a clan-like structure, family-managed enterprises, and an emphasis on flexibility and innovation. While most business management courses focus on public-management enterprises, the Hong Kong style family-management started to gain attention in academia in the West.[84] Today in the West, continuous innovation becomes vital for business success against the backdrop of global complexity. Peter Drucker, the man who invented the discipline of management in the U.S., and perceptive of many of the major developments of the late twentieth century, repeatedly emphasizes the importance of continuous innovation in the knowledge-based society. He gradually shifts more attention to development in East Asia, a turbulent region with rising opportunities, and notices a distinctive overseas Chinese business model. In Managing in Turbulent Times he calls the twenty-five years between the Marshall Plan and the OPEC cartel the “predictable times,” and after that the “turbulent times” in which planning alone no longer works and “an enterprise has to be managed both to withstand sudden blows and to avail itself of sudden unexpected opportunities”

(*Turbulent Times* 9) in the context of the integrated world economy, transnational world money and the weakening of sovereignty, etc. This is a close description of the way Hong Kong cinema operated in the 1990s. In Managing for the Future – the 1990s and Beyond, he predicts that the big enterprises will change from a command-and-control army model to the flat organizational model like that of an orchestra. In Managing in a Time of Great Change he calls the overseas Chinese, "the new economic superpower." They are the driving force behind the explosive economic growth of coastal China, leading the economies of the fast-growing countries of Southeast Asia and branching out to the West. Drucker perceptively points out that the multinational groups of the Overseas Chinese, unlike the Japanese or the typical Western companies, function in a distinctive way. They are like "a clan doing business together…The word of the founder-CEO is law. But his authority far more resembles that of a Confucian head of the house…than that of the head of a business…What holds together the multinationals of the overseas Chinese is neither ownership nor legal contract. It is mutual trust and the mutual obligations inherent in clan membership." (*Great Change* 171) Although he realizes the strength and deep roots in Chinese culture, and history of this clan structure, Drucker predicts that these overseas-Chinese multinationals will have to change in the next decade in view of a decade of surprises and turbulence in mainland China. Nevertheless, he is certain that they will maintain their basic Chinese character, "They will change details, but they won't change the fundamentals any more than the Japanese changed theirs when they modernized"(*Great Change* 208) In Drucker on Asia the themes of sea-change, borderless world, the knowledge society, entrepreneurship and innovation are more

accentuated and China becomes the focus. Drucker further elaborates on the distinctive Chinese management style and management structure, "I have often said that the secret of Japan consists in Japan's ability to make a family out of the modern corporation. The secret of Chinese management may well consist in the ability of the Chinese to make the family into a modern corporation." (7) In the 1990s, coastal China has been the fastest growing area in the world economy, and the importance of the Overseas Chinese is their contribution to mainland China. Ducker points out that while developed countries like Japan mainly invest in heavy capital equipment, the Overseas Chinese focus on the "invisible infrastructure" – a financial network which Bordwell calls "the bamboo network" in his study of the Hong Kong film industry. Hong Kong cinema, with its reliance on Overseas Chinese cash-based financing, instead of bank loan financing, was remarkably different from Hollywood starting at the financial sector.

In the decade of sovereignty change with political uncertainties, volatile regional economy and social restlessness, Hong Kong cinema, to compete in the world market without material power like Hollywood or government protection like a national cinema, fell back to local business cultural practices to provide stability and certainty for efficient operation. The producer functioned as a resourceful housekeeper, providing powerful backing for the production team in a system diametrically different from Hollywood, but adapted to Hong Kong's vibrant cultural and volatile political economic context in that specific era. The housekeeper phenomenon in the 1990s illustrates that the gender issue is an economic issue rather than a women's issue. The production sector of Hong Kong cinema developed a distinctive business model and style of management in "turbulent

times" when unique events changed its configuration, and planning did not work in a decade of unpredictability. To paraphrase Drucker, it is the strategy for tomorrow that enables a business "to take advantage of new realities and to convert turbulence into opportunity" (*Turbulent Times* 4) The role of producer was "the housekeeper" of a small filmmaking community operating in an informal setting. In this decade of confusion and uncertainty, when male producers softened up to become more collaborative, women producers geared themselves up to take up the executive role. If the producer was the embodiment of the strategy for tomorrow, the screenwriter seemed to be the epithet of yesteryear. Hong Kong filmmakers were known for their frantic filmmaking style, and shooting without a completed script, and where improvisation was the norm. The Hong Kong film industry seemed to go back to the 1960s practice of writing the script on the fly. Why did the screenwriting department stay in an outmoded stage of development in the 1990s? What was the role of the screenwriters in the system of Hong Kong cinema?

SCREENWRITER – THE DIRECTOR'S SERVICE PROVIDER

In contrast to the rising status of the producers, that of the screenwriters seemed to go downhill. This profession was plagued with all ills and was often the target of criticism. When the movies failed in the box office, a bad script was the first to receive the blame. In recent Hong Kong cinema history, scripts have seemed to be marginal in productions. In the 1970s, it was simply an afterthought for linking action sequences in Kung Fu flicks. In the 1980s, Cinema City style 9-reeler formulaic writing by committee was the standard practice. In the 1990s, shooting without a completed script was common. Wong Jing cranked out the script during shooting. Johnnie To purposely

changed the completed script on the set to refresh himself. Tsui Hark overhauled the story in the dubbing room. Even Wong Kar Wai, deeply influenced by literature, shot without a script. Hong Kong directors' frantic work style would have many believe that the Hong Kong film industry has no system, that the filmmakers just muddled through and the screenwriters simply played it by ear. Screenwriters were often required to be on-site during shooting to help keep the character and narrative coherent when mishaps happened and changes in the script were required. Some even have had to work also as assistant directors. They were exploited, owned no copyright of their brainchild, and were in a passive position relative to the production since projects were mostly initiated by financiers or directors. They became the director's epiphyte since the raison d'être for the screenwriter was serving the director. The Hong Kong film industry seemed to go back to the early Cantonese cinema tradition when there was no script and no division of labor. Hong Kong screenwriters' "backward" practice and low status looks odd when viewed from both contemporary and historical perspectives. Hong Kong's screenwriting process is particularly intriguing given the blueprint function of scripts in Hollywood as a modern business enterprise and the supremacy of the written language in Chinese culture. In the West, very early on Hollywood studios used the script as a blue print for production. There was a labor union to guard the welfare of its members and writers got both profit sharing and roller credit. In the 1990s Hong Kong was a westernized world- class city and has advanced to a service-oriented economy. However, the way Hong Kong writers worked indicates no hint of modern management. Situated in a Chinese society, the "illiterate" practice of this industry was at odds with the supremacy of written language in

Chinese civilization. Paperwork like scripts, contracts, memos, and meeting records were often minimized or skipped. Why did the screenwriting department stay at an outdated stage of development in the 1990s? What was the role of the screenwriters in the system of Hong Kong cinema?

Situated between China and the West, Hong Kong cinema developed a unique system. Hong Kong screenwriters worked under tremendous structural, industrial and cultural constraints. Their seemingly archaic and chaotic practice is not a sign of regression, but a survival mechanism. In facilitating the production to be more efficient and the director more creative, the screenwriter, by being adaptive to their fast-changing environment, played an important role in the system to sustain and reinvigorate Hong Kong cinema. The changing role of the writer illustrates how flexible, pragmatic and adaptive the system of Hong Kong cinema was. Writers, who used to be at the top of the social hierarchy in traditional Chinese society, also had to be flexible and accept the loss of status inherent in becoming the director's service provider.

Constraints and Varieties

Hong Kong screenwriters operated within delimited political, economic, cultural and industrial parameters different from that of their counterparts in Hollywood and Chinese cinema. Hong Kong was a colony and the domestic market was small. The Hong Kong film industry has neither lasting studio nor government support. The colonial government's requisite for political neutrality drove most Hong Kong productions to commercial apolitical entertainments. Heavy reliance on overseas markets obliged most mainstream filmmakers to abide by the censorship rules of their target markets. Hong

Kong writers had to be aware of and familiar with social taboos and political censorship rules in Hong Kong and overseas markets. A volatile regional market and non-standardized practices limited Hong Kong productions' access to completion bonds or bank loan financing. Hong Kong's movies were mostly financed by overseas distributors, who dictated the details of cast, genre, budget and delivery date. Although the cash-based financing and absence of demand for completed scripts allowed improvisation and creative autonomy, there were only two major genres in the 1990s: action and comedy. As a government film fund was not yet available and financing was mostly on an individual project basis, filmmakers had to be sensitive to the cultural pulse and market trends to attract financiers to reinvest for the next project. The screenwriters had to be able to write in the two major genres and be ready to crank out sequels on short notice to capitalize on any successful formula. As Hong Kong productions were star-driven, they also had to be familiar with the star system and write around the star. More importantly, they had to be able to overhaul the story quickly if there was a change of cast. Since in Hong Kong cinema the director was the center of creative control and every department was geared to support the director, the writers had to work around the director. Before the shooting, the writer had to provide a shoot-able script, in written or mental form, tailor-made for the director and the particular production. During the shooting, the writer had to ensure the software work to actualize the ultimate product, the film. The function of the screenwriter was not to manufacture a tangible product, a script. In Hong Kong in that decade, a script had no market value if it could not be made into a film. Screenwriting

was a service profession. The writer's job was to support the director and help the production to be more efficient.

With no studio or strong labor union to set standards for work procedures and the division of labor, there were a variety of ways for people to enter and work in this industry as screenwriters. Some were only involved in the brainstorming stage and some specialized in the write-up. In Hong Kong the entire pool of screenwriters was small and full-time mono-task screenwriters were rare. When the Hong Kong Screenwriters' Guild was established in 1991 there were only sixty plus members and anyone who "has the potential talent and sincerity to be a screenwriter can apply." (Reporter) In 1992, there were about one hundred plus members, but only twenty to thirty of them worked full time. The majority were part-timers or amateurs and only a few could write a completed script independently. The following sample of writers illustrates the various ways writers worked and how they negotiated their agency. Some have been active since the 1950s; some were active only in the 1980s and some emerged in the 1990s. Some judge this chaotic practice by Hollywood standards; some embrace it and appreciate the beauty of the system.

In the 1980s and 1990s as the Hong Kong film industry got more aggressive in new markets, the status of the screenwriters seemed to diminish. Chen Jinchang points out that in commercial filmmaking screenwriters are "intellect laborers" and screenwriting is "just a servicing profession." "In the filmmaking process, the screenwriters provide the best service and list all possible plot devices. Their only goal is to meet the director's requirements. The written language is not the final product and

thus the script per se has no value. It's only a transitional tool." (18) In their survey of ten screenwriters Yang Xiaowen and Luo Miaolan sadly state that "the screenwriter was just the director's epiphyte, a writing machine for the director." They lament the writers' passive position, "They are hired after the boss or the director came up with an idea. It is extremely rare for Hong Kong screenwriters to sell their scripts to the boss like their counterparts in Hollywood." (54) Yang and Luo say the low status of the screenwriters is reflected by their low pay, an estimated median of 100,000 to 200,000 HKD, far lower than that for directors and actors. Given the way the writers were hired, it was hard to fight for professional respect and creative autonomy. There were in general three ways the screenwriters were hired. The first type were those who were also directors or financiers/bosses like Clifton Ko (Ko Chi Sum), Jeff Lau, Tsui Hark and Lawrence Cheng (Cheng Tan Shoi). But they had to hire someone to do the writing once they started the shooting, because they became too busy to do the writing. The second type was those hired by the director or the financier. Usually the director had already worked out the major plot and secured the major cast before discussing a detailed plotline with his hired writers. Yang and Luo say 90% of Hong Kong screenwriters were this type. The third type were like Hollywood screenwriters. "They finished their scripts and then sell them to the boss. But this is extremely rare. Cheung Chi Sing and Sandy Shaw (Shaw Lai King) each had once successfully sold their scripts." (54) Both the first and third types had their difficulties. Yang and Luo explain that a writer like Lawrence Cheng could afford not to compromise because he owned a production company, but most couldn't even afford to complain. However, Cheng had to bear the risk of not finding financing.

The situation was worse for the third type because he would be doing it for naught if he could not sell the script. Yang and Luo explain Hong Kong writers' "inactivity". They state: "Even if the screenwriters have a lot of ideas, they won't spend time to develop it. They only pitch it verbally and will do the writing only after the idea is sold." (54) Nevertheless, there are opposing opinions. Cheung Tan says he always has nice directors and seldom feels pressured to compromise. Neophytes like Elsa Tang, a protégé of Tsui Hark, appreciates the way she works, "I am a new comer. I learn more techniques with people teaching and guiding me." (54) In a group chat, Bryan Chang (Chang Wai Hung) urged me to write a paper to let outsiders know how they worked. Besides being a director of independent film,[85]Chang also writes for commercial films, financial magazines and various media. He embraces the system and thinks the way Hong Kong screenwriters work things out is amazing.

Literati Pride

In an industry as commercial and disorganized as Hong Kong cinema, it is hard for the literati with a teaching or stage background to go along with mainstream practices. Raymond To (To Kwok-wai), Clifton Ko (Ko Chi Sum) and Elmond Yeung (Yeung Chi Sum) straddle the line between stage-theater and film. Raymond To taught for seventeen years before switching to professional writing. He is also an award-winning stage drama writer and a staff writer of the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre. Some of his popular stage dramas were adapted to films, but To resists the practice of committee writing in the film industry. He wrote the script for New Wave director Ann Hui's action film *Zodiac Killers* (1991) but Hui later had the respected Taiwan screenwriter Wu Nien-Jen write another

draft. Raymond To admits that he was upset about the re-write (Xiaowen Yang "Take Screenwriter Seriously?"). Raymond To laments, “Many writers do not regard scriptwriting as the only way to express themselves. The younger generation only sees that as a stepping stone. Their goal is to be a producer or director. Screenwriting is only a transitional stage...they don’t fight for better treatment for writers because they are not certain if they’ll stay as screenwriters forever.” (Xiaowen Yang "Take Screenwriter Seriously?" 58) Raymond To understandably adds, “Most directors and crews are respectful of the screenwriter’s opinion before the shooting. It is only after the shooting starts that things get out of control. From my years of experiences, however good the script is, without a good director, the film will still be a failure.” (Xiaowen Yang "Take Screenwriter Seriously?" 59) He says in stage drama the director is the one trying to actualize the scriptwriter’s heart and soul in the script. But in film production the screenwriter is the one to catch up with the director’s thought. In Yang and Luo’s survey, Sandy Shaw, Lam Chiu Wing and Keeto Lam agree that a competent director is the key for success and thus they do not mind their scripts being altered. Lam Chiu Wing jokes that, “A bad script in the hand of a talented director can turn into a good movie. But a good script in the hand of a mediocre director will absolutely fail as a movie.” (Yang and Luo 55) Raymond To feels disrespected when he spent three weeks finishing a draft only to have the director instantly call for revision after reading it in one night. Nevertheless, he finds consolation that most of his projects are referred by cinematographers or other crew members. He says, “That means sometimes crew members pay more attention to my scripts than the director does.” (Xiaowen Yang "Take Screenwriter Seriously?" 60)

He used to worry about a failed film tarnishing his name, but now realizes that people in the industry will still know his writing is good since his script went through multiple hands.

In the system of the 1990s the chemistry of the creative team was important for Hong Kong film production. Elmond Yeung points out that the troupe system in the 1990s was inherited from Cantonese Opera in which a troupe leader worked closely with the same cast and crew to tour around the country (Cindy S.C. Chan "Elmond Yeung"). It's the major cast and the troupes' name that sold tickets. Yeung is the writer of *Hold You Tight* (Stanley Kwan, 1998), [86] an award winning film shown in the mainstream theater with queer content, starring Chingmy Yau and produced by Golden Harvest. Yeung is not prolific by Hong Kong industry standards and his works are not genre films. His day job as a tea businessman allows him to listen attentively to his customers' stories in his tea house. He is also the director of the International Association of Theatre Critics (Hong Kong) and is involved in Cantonese opera, a vast reservoir of traditional myths and legends.

Despite the rich story material in Chinese culture, Raymond To was often asked to copy popular foreign films. He says what is lost in translation is the interpersonal relationships. Writers and directors like Raymond To, Elmond Yeung and Stanley Kwan are known for their sensitivity and are less associated with mainstream entertainment films. In response to the comment that film companies seeking quality non-mainstream scripts find that they are not having any scriptwriters approach them, Raymond To suggests a proactive approach, "We as screenwriters should change our temperament too.

We should be active like a sales person in selling our scripts." (Xiaowen Yang "Take Screenwriter Seriously?" 62) But he also adds the importance of the personality factor, "Say, I wrote a script and approach ten directors. I will get very different results. They will be interested to further the discussion, not because of my script per se, but because of my spirit in inspiring them." (Xiaowen Yang "Take Screenwriter Seriously?" 63) In Hong Kong even literati like Raymond To are not resistant to commercialism. To him, a commercial film means a quality film, "To help the box office, we need to make good films. The key is the film has to be well made, has a selling point and commercial value. Commercial value does not equal to crowd-pleasing." (Esther 57) Raymond To says in the past producers had the wrong perception that the only way to draw an audience is to keep them laughing. He thinks the downturn of the industry is good for him, "Now there are those who hire me not because I can churn out a script fast, but because they know I work hard and write well." (Esther 58) Despite his complaints, Raymond To continues to be an active writer.

Clifton Ko is known for his star-studded Chinese New Year entertainment (*hesui pian*).[87] Despites his success as a consistent box office hit writer-director, Ko was very vocal of the exploitation in the industry. He angrily says, "The screenwriters have no power to negotiate their pay. There is total lack of professional dignity. In the 1980s, the bosses are so disrespectful to screenwriters. They invest 5 to 6 million in a film project, 2 to 3 million is for the star but only 20,000 to 30,000 dollars is for the script." The boss usually green-lighted a project only based on the secured cast, and not the quality of the script. Ko says each year 130 films were released, but there were less than 40

professional screenwriters. He says, “It is like going back to the days of Cantonese cinema when the writer/director just tore off a small piece of paper from the cigarette pack and wrote the script on it. He wrote as the shooting went on. There was no complete story and the film has no integral style.” (Lang "All the Problems" 3) Ko is also upset by the lack of copyright protection. He directed the *It’s A Mad, Mad, Mad World* (1987) for D & B Films and the collaboration ended with the sequel in 1988. But D & B Films continued to use the character prototypes in the third episode in 1989. Ko quotes another example: Wong Jing created the “Plain Jane” character on TV[88] but now the character is moved to multiple films and Wong Jing didn’t get any royalty. The problem of lack of copyright protection for writers still went on in the 1990s. Writer-producer Chan Hing Kai’s observation succinctly describes the writers’ predicament in the Hong Kong film industry and is worth being quote at length here. He writes in his column, “In the past the contract for the screenwriter was service-oriented. Once the writer handed in the script and took the money, he had no more right. When the industry was in boom, all a writer wanted was to get all of his pay because the incidences of denying payment were so common. He would feel lucky enough to get full payment and thus would not go further to negotiate re-make right and other copyright. Such practice is still followed today. The production company owns every right…It says clearly in the contract that the creator owns no right to the films. However, certain clauses in those contracts in the past are too unfair that they are not recognized by international standard and thus are regarded as unequal treaty. Therefore, to play safe some companies, before they sell the film library, would re-sign a supplementary contract with the original creator to avoid future

dispute." ("Who Owns") The lack of copyright protection de-motivates youngster to take screenwriting seriously as a long term profession.

Star power was another factor in the writers' frustrations. Hong Kong productions were mostly star-driven and the overstepping power and unprofessional conduct of some stars often was the cause of chaos on the set. Raymond To says, "I worked my heart out to write those lines, but when they are left in the hands of the stars, the dialogues were distorted to become unrecognizable…A smart actor like Stephen Chow can improvise and do well. But some are mediocre. What's the point of putting so much effort in writing the lines?" (Esther 56) Ko, also a director, was in no better position to discipline the stars, "Nowadays in this film circle, the actors arrive late, leave early, drop by whenever they feel like. They totally disregard the crew. During the shooting, they take lunch break and leave for press conference. They come and go without informing anyone. Those overbooked stars… took the money without contributing much effort in their work. When they are on the set, they are seldom attentive. They can't memorize long lines and ask the director to change them. They always press the director to hurry and let them leave early." (Lang "All the Problems" 4) This misconduct was so commonplace that Ko said when he worked with disciplined actors like Michael Hui and Sylvia Chang, it was like a director's paradise.[89] In this 1988 interview, in regard to the practice of stealing ideas from foreign films, Ko's comment invoked a discourse of "Hong Kong being a colony and cultural desert" and hinted at the stifling effect of film censorship. He says, "It is inevitable that people in this film circle copying plots from foreign film. This is because Hong Kong has no cultural foundation. Chen Kaige can make a movie like

Yellow Earth because he has personally experienced it… If John Woo had not hit rock bottom in his life, he would not be able to express such feeling in *A Better Tomorrow.* Most writers grew up in Hong Kong's colonial education. It is hard to expand the directors' creative horizon. Sensitive topic is forbidden. 'Gimmick' becomes more important than life experience." (Lang "All the Problems" 4) However, in 1993 Ko did what he criticized: copy a foreign film and use gimmicks. *Crazy Love* (1993) is a copycat of the German soft porn *Griechische Feigen*.[90] The publicity focused on Loletta Lee (Lee Lai-chun), known for her teenage cutie pie role in *The Happy Ghost* series, taking her clothes off.

Low pay and a high burn out rate has been persistent in this industry. When Ko returned to Hong Kong in the mid-1980s and worked at Cinema City as an intern he got a meager income. Ko says, "My first film *The Happy Ghost* (1984) helped Cinema City make a net profit of 12 million. I originated most of the ideas and did the writing, but I got only 40,000 to 50,000 dollars. Even though back then this was enough to buy an apartment, it's still not fair…I should get half of it…this is exploitation…The boss of Golden Princess was nice and offered me some profit. Most bosses would just run away." (H. Huang "Clifton Ko" 46) After realizing that he was a cash cow at D&B Films with no hope of profit sharing, he established his own production company. He admits that so far (in the 1980s) the most profitable films of his company are soft porn. It was hard for writers to generate scripts quick enough to make up for the low pay. Ko says, "In 1967 the script fee for Chang Cheh's *One Armed Swordsman* was 30,000 dollars. Nowadays (1994), we still have script fee lower than 30,000 dollars. How can anyone be contented

to be a good writer? How can a young man see a career in screenwriting?" (H. Huang "Clifton Ko" 48) One could easily burn out in this industry. Ko continues, "For ten years, I gave my all. I worked both as writer and director. Originating ideas is hard enough and I have to churn out a few projects a year. This is taking a few years off my life." (H. Huang "Clifton Ko" 48) As director, Ko is also very efficient, "In technical aspect, I can claim as the top three directors in Hong Kong… I am more than sufficient in commanding on the set, controlling budget and schedule." (H. Huang "Clifton Ko" 48) Ko is one of the four directors of the charity film *The Banquet* (1991) which involved a cast of almost 200 top Hong Kong stars and was shot in less than 8 days.[91] By 1994, Ko felt it's time he should work on something he was passionate about. He made *I Have a Date with Spring* (1994), an adaptation from a stage drama with no major star, to commemorate his tenth anniversary in the industry. In the 1988 interview Ko complained about the investors being shortsighted and over-relying on star power. *I Have A Date With Spring* was his attempt to prove to them that he could make a hit without a star. However, this is the exception that proves the rule since this film's success was a fluke. There was no sequel and the main actress never again played a starring role in her career. Without recognizing the specific constraints of Hong Kong cinema, Ko idealizes Hollywood and criticizes Hong Kong's cultural poverty. He says, "Hong Kong has too few literatures. The screenwriters of foreign country do not have to originate their script…Most Hollywood movies are adapted from novels. They have something for you to base on. You don't have to start from scratch. The workload is much lighter." (H. Huang "Clifton Ko" 48)

Idealizing things Western was more evident in the 1980s. Kam Ping-hing, a film critic known for introducing auteur theory to Hong Kong in the Chinese Student Weekly in the 1960s, also envied of the respect foreign screenwriters enjoy. He so disliked directors altering the script that in a 1981 interview article titled "There should be rule forbidding unauthorized changes by the director" he says, "In a foreign country, one needs the consent of the screenwriter to alter the script. Even one line in the dialogue is no exception." (C.-t. Li "There Should Be Rule" 19) Kam studied film in Italy from 1968 to 1971 and returned to work in TV. He was a script supervisor before moving to the film industry when independent productions and the Hong Kong New Wave emerged. He was keen on quality scripts and abhorred seeing the filmmakers start shooting without a completed script. Kam attributes the New Wave films' weak scripts to the terrible conditions for the writers. In the 1980s writers were expected to finish a script within one month. The highest pay for a script was just 30,000 dollars and some was as low as 10,000 dollars. Kam says, "Hong Kong does not have a screenwriter labor union to control the standard. When you think the pay is too low, there is always somebody willing to take it... In foreign country they have a payment system. The labor union gets to set a certain percentage of the production budget for screenwriting fee." (C.-t. Li "There Should Be Rule" 19) When asked by the interviewer who the author of the film is Kam points out the fluid power structure of the industry, "It can be the writer. But whoever has a stronger character has a bigger say." (C.-t. Li "There Should Be Rule" 20) In response to my question on power structure, prolific and multi-task filmmaker Herman Yau said the same about the industry in the 1990s.[92] When asked who had the highest

authority, Yau said it varied across productions. There was no rule and power was always negotiable. In a magazine interview Kam admitted that his ultimate goal was to be a director because as a writer he could not actualize his ideas. Nevertheless, he appreciates the changes in the industry because there were more chances for young people in their twenties to be directors now (in the 1980s) whereas twenty years ago (the 1960s studio era) this was unthinkable. He says, "Nowadays if a young person wants to make a movie, if he has a good script, and if he can finish under 700,000 dollars, the chance of getting a deal is high. But he has to be proactive." Kam admits his personality weakness, "I am not active enough. This is a disadvantage. To get people to support your project, you need to have a thick skin to sell yourself. This is a modern tactic. People of our generation are not aggressive enough." (C.-t. Li "There Should Be Rule" 21) The interviewer Li Chuek-to, who embraces auteur theory and wrote extensively about the Hong Kong New Wave's movies, describes Kam as typical of the literati of his generation: passive but persevering and holding onto his principles. This group of literati believed in the efficacy of a good story. Raymond To rejected committee writing and did not work in genre film. Clifton Ko worked in the comedy genre but resisted the star system. Elmond Yeung leaned towards the niche market. Kam Ping-hing aspired to be an autonomous auteur. They pictured that a studio would provide better protection for the writers. In fact, in the decade characterized by social restlessness the studio protected the writers so well that some wanted to get out and make changes.

The Change

Chiu Kang-chien, also one of the literati, instead of being cynical, left his comfortable life in Shaw studio and ventured out into independent productions. Born in a turbulent time in China in 1940, he moved to a chaotic time in Taiwan in 1949 and was educated in the U.S. in 1964. He was active in both the Hong Kong and Taiwan film industry. He was one of the founders of the film journal Juchang[93], introducing films of Godard, Antonioni, Brecht and experimental films to Taiwan. He joined the Shaw studio from 1966 until 1974. In a 1981 interview Chiu described his eight years in Shaw studio as cozy, "It was comfortable and very free. I didn't feel pressured or under control...I didn't need to pay attention to the market situation." (F. Wong "Chiu Kang-Chien 1" 40) Four scripts a year was the maximum for him as a staff writer and some were made into films and some not. He got 3,000 dollars for each, but he still got 1,000 dollars monthly salary even when he didn't finish the script. Usually Shaw studio's boss Run Run Shaw came up with a project idea and informed the script supervisor, who then coordinated the staff writers. Chiu said the system was not very strict, since the office administrators or the directors could contact the writers directly if they wanted to alter the scripts even though the administrator had the final say. It was quite free the in early years when the four major directors of the studio could pick their scripts and make whatever they wanted. Their status was almost like founders of the studio. It was only in the later years that the power shifted to the administrators. While writers of the 1990s had to serve and tailor-make the script for the director, Chiu handed in his script without knowing which director would get the assignment. He said in those years in Taiwan his scripts would

either be rejected by the censor or go through numerous revisions. But in the Shaw studio, he just did things his way, "I usually don't pay much attention to the others. My method is: when the boss or director told me, 'I want to make such and such a martial arts film. I want this and that.' I would always say yes. But when I went home I wrote my own thing. They were usually satisfied with what I wrote. This is my strength. They didn't have to worry about hiring someone else to revise my script. Nevertheless, they worried about me not coming up with anything because sometimes I dragged for so long that it made everybody unhappy. I know I am emotional and not professional enough." (F. Wong "Chiu Kang-Chien 2" 33) In the Shaw studio staff writers like Chiu only needed to write up a completed script without going through the administrator's approval. So when he worked for independent productions, which required him to write a synopsis and an outline, he found it hard. "It's because a good synopsis contains only two to three sentences. It cannot present dialogue, personalities and atmosphere etc." (F. Wong "Chiu Kang-Chien 1" 39) In the Shaw studio, Chiu was not required to be active, to pitch an idea, to have a thick skin in selling his scripts, or to care about market changes. Chiu says he didn't do any writing on his own when there was no assignment. "I spent a lot of time sleeping. There was one year I didn't write anything, but I still got my monthly salary." (F. Wong "Chiu Kang-Chien 1") However, in 1972-1973 Chiu suddenly became prolific. He says, "I led a very comfortable life in Shaw studio. I didn't want to work. I didn't read any books. I didn't write anything. I felt dazed and confused. That was until 1972-73, when I felt like I have to do something. I wrote a lot of poems and hung out with young activists of the Diaoyu Island movement. I published poems on The 70s journal[94]…The

first few years in the Shaw studio I did get something done. But gradually I idled my time away. When I realized I wanted to do something, there were a lot of problems. I worked as a director but failed. It was that year, 1973." (F. Wong "Chiu Kang-Chien 1" 40) The mid-1970s was an edgy time [95] and it showed on the screens when the industry was opened up to the younger generation. Chiu noticed the changes, "I didn't see much breakthrough in Taiwan. But Hong Kong television and film gave me the impression that they were closer to life. They said a lot of things. Bits and pieces everywhere like slice of life." (F. Wong "Chiu Kang-Chien 2" 33) He says Hong Kong New Wave directors' films like *The Secret* (1979), *The Sword* (1980), or *Dangerous Encounter – 1st Kind* (1980), though refreshing, have problems in the structure of their scripts. Chiu read a lot of scripts in Taiwan and Hong Kong and concluded, "So far I haven't seen any script as good as those of foreign countries, including mine. Our screenwriters are still falling behind." (F. Wong "Chiu Kang-Chien 2" 34) In independent productions, there was the chronic problem of drafty scripts due to rushing. Chiu said the revisions he did on the others' scripts were usually extensive and he provided rich detail in his own scripts so that directors did not have to do scriptwriting on the set. Yet, he said he didn't publish his screenplay, "I used to think that the biggest revenge to the director is to publish my original screenplay. But in the end I couldn't find one good enough to be published." (F. Wong "Chiu Kang-Chien 2" 34) Chiu did not criticize the chaotic way Hong Kong New Wave directors made their writers work. In the studio days, he didn't have to discuss things with the directors, but in the 1980s he had to have frequent meetings with

directors. In response to what he felt about the new way of working, he simply said, "I want some changes." (F. Wong "Chiu Kang-Chien 2" 34)

The Realists

The intellectual used to be at the top of the traditional Chinese social hierarchy commanding respect and authority. Writers who forget to check their egos before entering this industry would feel degraded. But women, people from business or popular culture backgrounds, the younger generation growing up under colonial education, as well as amateurs or part-timers usually do not carry this psychological baggage. They do not have a privileged position to begin with, or tie their identities to this profession and thus do not feel their authority threatened or integrity compromised. They do not have unrealistic expectations in this petite audio-visual commercial entertainment industry situated in a small colonial dialect-speaking society. In 1981 Joyce Chan wrote an amusing piece, quoting humorous self-deprecations by Hollywood prominent writers to illustrate the difficulties these writers faced. She neither idealizes nor criticizes Hollywood. She concludes that regardless of one's rank, writers working in the commercial media all face constraints. She takes American television writer Paddy Chayefsky's example as her guide, since Chayefsky's career covered radio, television, stage drama, movie and the novel, but he never posted himself as an orthodox scholarly writer. Chan writes, "I identify myself with him. I know which path I want to go. It is the one he started thirty years ago." (24) Chan was born in 1936, and active in the 1970s-1980s, a time when women in the industry were rare and screenwriting was hardly

considered a prestigious profession. Chan is not prolific by Hong Kong standards and her works are associated with the young Hong Kong New Wave directors.[96]

In contrast, Szeto On has a long and extremely prolific career and has witnessed the boom and bust of the industry a few times. He works on a wide variety of genres and produced more than 500 scripts.[97] In the database of the Hong Kong Film Archive it is claimed that he probably is one of the most prolific screenwriters in Hong Kong or even in the world.[98] He is one of the five consultants of Hong Kong Screenwriters' Guild.[99] Born in Guangzhou in 1927 and arriving in Hong Kong in 1949 Szeto entered the film industry with his actor brother's referral. In Cantonese cinema and later in independent productions, pitching is such an important skill for writers that even a childhood disability could not get in the way. Szeto says his stuttering problem was corrected after working as a screenwriter (Z. Yan). Even a director with an extensive literature background like Wong Kar Wai asserts in various occasions that if a writer cannot tell the story verbally, he cannot tell it well in written form either. Ng See Yeun, chair of the Federation of Hong Kong Filmmakers, said in a 1994 interview that he didn't need a good script, he only needed the screenwriter to tell an appealing story in one minute (W. He "Ng See Yuen Says"). Even without an American film school education or training in Hollywood, veteran Hong Kong filmmakers instinctively know "High Concept", the skill of succinctly telling a story in 25 words (Wyatt). In this community, it seems that Chinese written language skills are secondary to pitching and life experience. Anyone can be a screenwriter. Sze To ran a business before stumbling into the film industry. Tsui Hark is known for inviting people from all walks of life to be writers, whether he is a

chef or a technician (Cindy S.C. Chan "Organized Chaos"). Lam Ling Nam (Nan Yan), the first chair of the Hong Kong Screenwriters' Guild and screenwriter and lyric writer of *Prison on Fire* (Ringo Lam, 1988), has only a primary education. He worked various odd jobs including jade jewelry apprentice, in transportation, and as a judo instructor and gangster (H. Yang). Elmond Yeung is a tea businessman. Yang Wong (Wong Yan-kuai) is a painter and art director. Keeto Lam is a special effects expert. Throughout the history of Hong Kong cinema screenwriters have come from diversified backgrounds.

Exploitation was also carried forward from the early years to the 1990s. Szeto wrote his first script for the then famous director Chow Sze-luk with a promised fee of 500 dollars. But he took home only 300 dollars because his script was not used. This is very fortunate compared to the 1990s when screenwriters, despite the time and effort they spent, often got nothing when the script was not used or the project fell through. Szeto says getting paid is even harder than pitching an idea, "Being a screenwriter is hard. We use our brains to think, our mouths to pitch and our hands to write. In the end, we exhaust ourselves to get our promised pay." (Z. Yan 46) In the 1990s the director usually worked with a group of writers, which means the writers had to share among themselves the meager fee. According to Szeto, in the 1990s the fee ranged from 20,000 and 30,000 to 200,000 and 300,000 dollars. He says he never wrote a top dollar script. Even Golden Harvest paid only 100,000 dollars for a script. Like many Hong Kong screenwriters, Szeto is self-educated. In the early years of his career as a writer, he was always between jobs. He later entered a company to work for film publicity with a monthly salary of 200 dollars. He says, "In that three to four years I got to know a lot of producers and

bosses...everyday after work I went to see the 5:30 pm screening. They were Hollywood majors' productions. In a few years, I studied the plots of more than 1,000 Hollywood features." (Z. Yan 45) Later he switched back to scriptwriting and got more job offers than he could handle. He says he was paid 1,000 dollars for each script, which was 7 to 8 times the monthly salary of the average person back then. He claims, "My scripts are very commercial. I put a lot of entertaining elements into it. I don't pay much attention to theme, characterization or drama theory. I didn't study film in school. I think once the script is finished, the characters will present themselves. You don't need theory to confine yourself. Otherwise you'll never be able to write a script…I have my own procedure in screenwriting. First, I'll write a story outline and then a scene by scene draft. Nowadays almost no one would write major lines and dialogue in this draft. But this was our common practice then. We would wait for the director's approval before proceeding to write a full script…whether it's a 100,000 or 50,000 dollars a piece, I would write in the same manner. Nowadays there are so many problems between screenwriters and the companies. Now, one third of my job is to revise the others' scripts." (Z. Yan 45-46) In the 1990s, the power structure of film production was so fluid that a director's authority could be challenged by veteran workers: from a cinematographer to the screenwriters. Arguments on the set were not uncommon, especially when the director was new and inexperienced. Szeto agrees that in the production hierarchy the director should be superior to the screenwriter, and he advises fellow screenwriters to respect instead of confront the director. He says he pays the same respect to a director whether he is a veteran, a young one or even a first timer. He has no problem with brainstorming with

directors, and he admits he learns a lot from those sessions. Despite his status in the field he still lives a disciplined life. He starts writing at 9 a.m. after his morning tea ritual. He does not drink, smoke or stay up late. He says, "I can finish a scene by scene script in 10 days. For difficult one, it will take me about two weeks. Screenwriting now is very different from the days of Cantonese cinema. I have to pay more attention to dialogues, especially in stories of young people. I sometimes consult youngsters on the way they talk. All these years, I keep reading books, newspapers and magazines to enrich myself." (Z. Yan) He advises young people interested in screenwriting to be prepared to play the role of a defendant, being constantly challenged by others. He says, "I have been a defendant for more than 30 years and got used to it. Don't underestimate yourself and don't be over-conscious of the others' comments. Otherwise that will break your nerve." (Z. Yan 47) Szeto doesn't mind his script being altered, being made answerable to the director, doing brainstorming or finishing a script in a short time. However, to him the screenwriter's job should end with the completed script and asking the screenwriter to be on set for script revision, a common practice in the 1990s, is preposterous.

Being prolific seems to be an essential trait for most Hong Kong screenwriters. Nan Yan wrote more than 20 scripts in the space of 8 years (H. Yang). Ni Kuang is another legendary prolific writer with more than 300 scripts and a few hundred novels on martial arts, detective stories and sci-fi. He was the Shaw Studio principal screenwriter and one of the few highest-income professional writers. Despite his heavy workload and busy social life, Ni claims that he never missed a deadline. Interestingly, Ni is not impressive in terms of language skills and education. He was born in 1935 in Shanghai

and moved to Hong Kong in 1957. His mother tongue is Shanghainese and his spoken language is described as "high speed Cantonese with 30% discount" (Shek and Chen) Even though his close friend Louis Cha (Jin Yong) is a prominent modern Chinese language novelist, Ni admits that his own education was only equal to secondary 3 level and he doesn't know English. He also admits that he didn't do research for his sci-fi novel Wesley or put much effort into language technique. He wrote his scripts in Mandarin and the directors have to translate them into Cantonese. He says he adapted a character from Louis Cha's novel into Chang Cheh's *One Armed Swordsman* so well that no one notices its origin. "Not only are Louis Cha's novels hard to adapt, they are also very hard to translate because Cha puts a lot of effort in his language skill. But I don't," says Ni frankly. In 1981, Ni already had his novel translated into Japanese and Cha has none yet.[100] Unlike other writers, Ni is shrewd in business and he has a strategy to survive as a screenwriter in Hong Kong's harsh conditions. He says, "My rule is I get all my payment first and I'll hand in the script in three days. I won't do any revision… If I discuss with the director and revise my script, it may make the film better. But it will be hard for me to make a living unless they increase the scripting fee." (Shek and Chen 37) He has another tactic that helped keep his work looking fresh in the 1990s: a fast pace. In the interview in 1980s when formulaic films were common, he said, "I feel that films now have abandoned structure…They only need to keep audience stimulated…I agree that films should be fast pace. My dialogue never exceeds 50 words." (Shek and Chen 31) He also comments that the Hong Kong New Wave films are lacking in structure and, "Their films are too local, too Hong Kong-oriented, too focus on niche market. Movie

should be an international language. Filmmaking is completely a commercial activity." Ni presciently tells of the crisis of that generation that was soon absorbed by the mainstream. In 1981 as Hong Kong was about to enter the transitional stage, Ni planned to write a novel titled The Person in an Interstitial Space. "It's about this generation of Hong Kong people. Aren't we all like that character in an interstitial space?" (Shek and Chen 37) As a prolific writer of popular culture, he is sensitive to the cultural pulse.

Lilian Lee is also an established popular novelist. In a round table in 1981 Lillian Lee and Szeto Cheuk Hon admitted that they were writers with no ambition to be directors, unlike most writers of that time (Shan and Chen). Lee authored the novel and movie *Farewell My Concubine* (1993). Szeto scripted Tsui Hark's radical film *Dangerous Encounter – 1st Kind* (1980). Both agree that the position of the screenwriter should be secondary to that of the director. Szeto says, "Of course the screenwriter is not the director's equal. His status may just be like that of a light man." (Shan and Chen 23) Despite her insistence on a writer's right to personal expression, Lee agrees on the directors' central role in organizing the project. Although her early scripts are mostly for Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), the non-commercial government TV station, Lee does not reject commercialism. She says, "As a screenwriter you need to bring people who don't know you to buy ticket and stay in front of the screen." (Shan and Chen 23) Despite his literati outlook, Szeto says Hong Kong movies need not be message-loaded, "Just make it exciting and entertaining and let the audience passes time happily. Message is cheap. Instilling meaning is too much responsibility!" (Shan and Chen 23) Lee adds that the writer shouldn't be burdened by her sense of mission. Szeto said he did not even

mind not having credit, "I am more for the money than the fame. When I take a project, I seldom discuss about credit. This film circle is small. People can tell who is actually doing the work and who did a good job. So long as you write a good script, people will approach you." In this 1981 discussion Szeto's confession indicates how non-standardized the film business was, at least in giving roller credit. Lee insists on having her name in the credits not because of fame, but for the sake of being responsible. In answering the question "What is the quality of a good scriptwriter?" Szeto and Lee point out the quintessential requirements in Hong Kong: be adaptive and quick."Be adaptive…meet the director's requirement, solve the problem for him," says Szeto. "Good screenwriter must be able to write up her ideas and inspiration within a short time," Lee adds. Being able to write a script on the fly seems to be an essential skill for Hong Kong writers.

For writers surviving the 1990s it takes strong passion, mental strength and a sense of humor. A decade after Joyce Chan's article, Lam Chiu Wing, a major in Chinese in college in the 1980s, also wrote an amusing piece about his experience (C. W. Lam). Lam's career path covers newspaper columns, radio, television, movie and stage drama and he did not take himself seriously either. Lam amusingly says as a screenwriter he is accountable only to one person, that is, the director while the director is answerable to the boss, the producer, the audience and the tea lady. In recounting an incident of exploitation and humiliation, he appreciates himself for keeping his cool. The boss neither paid him nor returned his draft. The man finally yielded under group pressure but verbally humiliated him in public. He swallowed his pride and took the cheque instead of

tearing it up as a gesture of defiance. Writers got cheated so often that helping members to get their pay became the major task of the Hong Kong Screenwriters' Guild. Brainstorming is a collective process, but the pressure is not spread thin. Lam jokingly describes that every time when he was locked up alone in a hotel room to instill the group's three months' effort into one hundred pages, he wanted to kill himself. He relishes the days when he was a part-timer while having a secure day job. After he got his down payment he couldn't care less. He would wish for the project to fall through, be hyperbolic with the cast, insist on exotic location shooting or post himself as a non-compromising artist. However, when he works full time, he is always ready to yield and cannot be selective in picking projects. Passion in writing is the reason he stays. He enjoys chatting with directors and getting paid for talking.

Writers who also work in administration at the executive level are more pragmatic. Chan Hing Kai, screenwriter, producer, column writer and consultant, does not find it beneath his dignity to stand by on the set to help revising the script. In response to my comments on writers' low status, Chan Hing Kai points out how smart Hong Kong screenwriters are to get around constraints (Cindy S.C. Chan "Chan Hing Kai"). For example, when a popular bankable teenage idol could not deliver certain lines, he instantly rewrote her dialogue to get closer to her real life personality so that she could present them naturally. The result was everybody praised the star's acting skill without knowing of the writer's effort in covering up her defects and accentuating her strength. Sandy Shaw, Creative Manager of a film company, insists that the writer should balance

between creative expression and market calculation. She says it is a work ethic to act responsibly for the boss' investment (Mai "Sandy Shaw").

In Hong Kong cinema writers and directors may never have equal status, but their relationship was definitely close. Sammo Hung and his writer Barry Wong were inseparable.[101] Lam Ning Nam and Ringo Lam are brothers. Tsui Hark and his brainstorm group wine and dine together like family (D. Liu). Johnnie To (To Kei Fung), Wai Ka-fai and You Nai-hoi are a known creative trio. Wai Ka-fai was born in 1962 and entered the TVB (the major TV station in Hong Kong) screenwriter training class in 1981. He worked his way up to script supervisor, executive producer and later moved to ATV (the smaller TV station in Hong Kong) until he formed a company with Johnnie To. He and You Nai Hoi always ask themselves, "Do you dare to write like this?" However, on the other hand, he says, "We also have to consider whether it is shoot-able for Johnnie To." (Ernie Au 30) Their scripts have to be shoot-able in the Hong Kong context and tailor-made for the director Johnnie To. Johnnie To is one of those Hong Kong directors who thrives on chaos. Even when a completed script was available, he would deliberately make changes in order to refresh himself on the set (Shin *Johnnie To*). Their collaboration best illustrates the importance of chemistry and how they turn limitations to their advantage. Wai describes, "We have worked in this industry for so long that now we no longer need a completed script on day one…We like a more spontaneous way of creation. For example, it is now 3:30 in the afternoon. We have a scene to shoot tonight. You Nai-hoi and I will start brainstorming now and do the filming tonight… In the past I used to insist on a completed and detailed script. Now I find that when we don't have

enough time and are always being rushed, paradoxically our creative horizon is expanded. The more you think, the more you hesitate. Sometimes some ideas come out from pressure. It is only under pressure that we have the energy and dynamite power. The key is whether you dare to use this material. Whenever some vague ideas come up, I'll write it down and film it. The three of us have a very good understanding and we have confidence in each other… The advantage of this method is we can observe how the actor acts. After two to three days, we can tell how well the actor acts and what her limitation is. That way the screenwriter and actor can be more interactive. This is similar to the way I wrote script in TV. Filming a TV series takes a long time. We'll watch playback after each sequence. We can tell which segment is good or not. For the part the actor played well, we'll expand it. For the part the actor didn't do well, we'll stop writing in that direction…Shooting with completed script is too rigid." (Ernie Au 31-32) Johnnie To describes how he worked with Sammy Cheng, a popular singer with no rigorous acting training (Shin *Johnnie To*). He says Cheng is a spontaneous actress and usually her first take is the best. So he avoid rehearsal and work around Cheng's characteristic to get the best out of her. Wai says he and Johnnie To both are fun-loving people and prefer the unbeaten path. The key to their collaboration is mutual trust (Ernie Au).

To have the screenwriter working as a service provider is not exclusive to commercial cinema. The "low status" of the screenwriter in Hong Kong is most probably due to the informal organization structure of the film industry, than to Hong Kong being a "cultural desert" or Hong Kong cinema being commercial and popular. In another Chinese-language cinema, Taiwan cinema, known for its master directors and

international award winning films, even screenwriters like Chu Tien-wen, herself a prominent writer who began her literary career at a young age, claims that she is just a senior secretary of director Hou Hsiao-Hsien. She says, "For me the real creative process is in the discussion session. Taiwan cinema is a handicraft industry and a director cinema. In Taiwan New Cinema, the director is the initiator of the project and the screenwriter functions as the director's sounding board. Director Hou always scribbles the script onto his daughter's school exercise book. It is '*tianshu*' (a book from heaven) – abstruse and illegible that no one can understand it. For me there is no creative pleasure in the writing process at all. The target reader of the script is the crew and investors. It has to be written as clearly as possible. Director Hou himself does not read the script and he does not let the actors read it either…I'm just working as a senior secretary." (T.-w. Chu) Nevertheless, Chu also adds that when working on *Flower of Shanghai* (Hou Hsiao-Hsien, 1998) she kept sending books for Hou to read. She says Hou used to make commercial films and back then she and her intellectual friends did not watch Taiwan productions. They only watched Hollywood features and Hong Kong New Wave movies, and the Taiwan Golden Horse Award was dominated by Hong Kong productions. Unlike those returning from overseas film school educations such as Edward Young, Hou's career started with commercial film and gradually made an artistic turn since working with Chu. Chu has had a close collaboration with Hou since 1982 and has written numerous screenplays of Hou's award-winning films.[102] Despite her self-deprecation, Chu Tien-wen is far from a service provider like most Hong Kong screenwriters of the 1990s were, although she also has to work around the director.

In the 1990s in Hong Kong cinema's star-driven director-centric production, the director revolved his work around the star. The screenwriter revolved his life around the director. Crises on the set were caused not only by tight budgets and schedules, but also by spontaneous directors, and overbooked stars. The writer's job did not end with a completed script. The writer had to be almost a clairvoyant to anticipate the needs of the director who usually could plead temporary insanity during shooting on the set. The writer had to check his ego, play the role of a service provider to the director, make the star's acting look good, be adept in writing in the two mainstream genres, quick in churning out sequels, and most importantly help the director get the best out of the worst situation. He had to be quick, flexible and resourceful. The seemingly chaotic way the writers worked is not a sign of regression. The changing role of screenwriter illustrates how Hong Kong filmmakers were being adaptive to changing modes of production and the specific constraints of the Hong Kong film industry. What did not seem to change much is the Hong Kong cinema's director-centered production approach. Every professional position had to work around the director. In the 1990s Hong Kong cinema was known in the world not only for its collective kinetic style but also for the individual director's vision and personal film style. Hong Kong directors, from the most commercial to the most artistic, seemed to enjoy a high degree of creative autonomy despite the constraints of the extreme commercial system. Are they auteurs? How did each of them, from the most commercial to the most artistic, work out his tactic to survive and thrive in the system? What stories did they tell about Hong Kong in this decade?

"I am a typed director. If I made Cinderella, the audience would immediately be looking for a body in the coach." –Alfred Hitchcock

SECTION III

THE SUPERMARKET OF HONG KONG CINEMA

CAN THE LOCAL SPEAK?

In the 1990s when Hollywood domination in Asian markets intensified, Hong Kong cinema was locally successful and internationally influential. It was like a Chinese Hollywood, commercial entertainment oriented but with a Chinese flavor. It followed Hollywood's market mechanism inherent in the studio system – the dialectical process of standardization and differentiation.[103] On the one hand the producers standardize the filmmaking process for efficient mass production. On the other hand they differentiate their products to lure the audience back for repeated consumption. Despite the absence of the integrated studio, Hong Kong filmmakers had their ways to standardize filmmaking for efficient mass production. For example, the productions were star-driven and genre-driven. And in face of uncertainties, they also capitalized on a hit by churning out sequels and series. To differentiate from Hollywood products, Hong Kong cinema leaned toward local differentiation, and specialized in action and comedy. The Hong Kong action aesthetic was competitive not only in domestic and regional markets, but also in the U.S.

However, in the Hong Kong film industry the professional organizations were not powerful to protect the interests of their members. Without strict legal regulation on

intellectual property, copyright, royalty, residue revenue, and the involvement of lawyers and contracts in the film industry, the creations of the filmmakers were not protected. The filmmakers either suffered creative burnout trying to keep up with the pace of sequels, or they could not build a franchise and profit from their hits when the markets were quickly saturated by dozens of copycats. There were endless sequels, series, spin-offs and copycats churned out within months to capitalize on any successful product. For example, after the success of *Once Upon A Time in China* (1991) there were eight sequels and spin-offs within the space of seven years produced by Tsui Hark himself alone. After the success of Wong Jing's *God of Gamblers* (1989), there were a few dozen gambler films with titles like "Knight of Gamblers", "Saint of Gamblers", "King of Gamblers" and "Queen of Gamblers" by Wong Jing and various directors. The same goes for stars. For example, Chow Yun Fat, after the success of his character Mark in John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), repeatedly played the reluctant hero shooting with two guns. Brigitte Lin, after the success of her trans-gender character Asia the Invincible in *Swordsman II* (Ching Siu-tung, 1993), repeatedly played an androgynous character in costume. The illusion of the ease of mass production, the mechanical calculation of the star and genre formula, and the seemingly unsophisticated cash-based method of financing attracted the triads to pump hot money into this business and boost output. Hong Kong theaters were fed annually with 150 local films, many being quickies of sequels and copycats of the same genres with the same stars. In the domestic market how did these mass produced local features compete with glossy Hollywood products? What was their appeal? How did they even differentiate amongst themselves? And would Hong Kong local production, integrated in the international market while claiming a collective cultural identity, in fact inscribe itself into a subordinate position in relation to Hollywood? Can the local have a

voice, a collective locus of agency to speak for its condition without assuming a cultural unity among a heterogeneous people? That is, can the local speak?

Hong Kong cinema would remain anonymous in the world if not for the typed directors and their signature movies. In the 1970s, even though Bruce Lee had single handily brought the Chinese kung fu film to the world stage, back then Hong Kong cinema as a collective was un-differentiable in the world market. Glocalization, local adaptation of the global, is not a sufficient challenge to the cultural homogenization thesis. With the dominant in the global setting parameters for the local, what is left for the local to adapt is already defined and confined. Hong Kong cinema, a commercial and transnational cinema, was embedded in the global system. In the era of intensified globalization, everyone from the rest of the world had to work within the world capitalist system and make do with the niche markets. Hong Kong cinema, situated in an open port city, was reduced to a cultural banana republic, producing only two major genres. The Chinese martial arts infused action film, and the verbal gag-oriented comedy were the only genres that Hong Kong cinema could find its niche in, within a Hollywood-dominated world.

Hong Kong cinema was popular and yet recognized for its individual filmmakers' personal vision and style. The debates in global media studies often focus on the dichotomy between the global and the local/national without going further to the personal level. They overlook the personal dimension of transnational media. The Hong Kong film industry, populated by numerous independent productions, was like a supermarket mixing high and low cultures. To survive fierce competition in a supermarket, there was the economic motivation for the filmmakers to brand themselves. Directors were increasingly compelled to develop a personal style and producers had to find different methods of making films that showcased these styles. At the local level, the means for

negotiating autonomy within the industry commercial system was authorship, i.e. by marking one's identity and getting to the privileged place of author helped the director create a recognition factor within the community. At the global level, Hong Kong cinema was recognized for its collective style and the means for insubordination, so negotiating autonomy within the global system was also authorship. The keener the global competition, the greater the emphasis on the distinctive styles of individual filmmakers. In global media studies, adopting mostly the political economy and quantitative approach, the role of human agency in the system and the function of abstract factors like the charisma of the director in production management are often overlooked.

Filmmakers of the 1990s, albeit making personal films, were more "calculating" than the previous generation and tended to be hyphenated director-producers. In European art cinema the auteur is at the center of the system. Authorship is credited to the director and the film is considered an expression of his personal vision and obsession. In classical Hollywood, the producer was at the apex of the studio system. Authorship is attributed to the producer who creatively contributed in the production and has his personality written into the films, as Schatz argues (*Genius*). But Hong Kong cinema was neither a director cinema nor a producer cinema. The system of the film industry was not controlled by a producer-centered management, nor was it dominated by directors operating without commercial considerations. The expansion of the scale of production and runaway overseas production made the role of producers become more significant, but the industry maintained the director-centric production approach. What was the role and function of the director in the system of Hong Kong cinema?

Classic auteur theory is challenged for being overly romantic about directors transcending structural constraints, but Gerstner and Staiger point out the usefulness of the authorship approach in studying the dynamic relationship between the individual and

system. They state, "the individuals…function within the constraints and possibilities of the cultural fields and systems that inform the filmmaking conventions in which they operate. What is at stake, of course, is negotiating these systems through the [marking] of their identities in relationship to these conventions and method of filmmaking" (xii). The directors in Hong Kong cinema were situated authors, that is, they worked within the political parameters set by the colonial government, inside the commercial systems of Hong Kong cinema, the Asian regional market and international film festivals, and developed personal styles with influences from Hollywood, Asian cinema and European art cinema, as well as the Hong Kong mainstream cinema's extravagant style and neurotic energy. Each type of director found his position, branded himself, solidified his type and had his signature genre and his usual collaborators. Besides being the center of creative control, the director had to perform a branding function. In terms of consciousness in branding and filmmaking practices, filmmakers from the most commercial to the most artistic had more in common than they had differences, since they worked within the same political, economic, social, cultural and industrial context.

The following case studies are about how these individual directors interacted with the system of Hong Kong cinema, itself embedded in the global system. These hyphenated authors (writer-director-producer-agent) were industry savvy, knowledgeable about the history of the industry, its constraints and possibilities and thus conversant with the viable means to get their movies made and sold. When bonus, profit sharing and residue earning were not common practices, stars were often overbooked to capitalize on their ephemeral fame. The crew had to hop from project to project. The charisma of the director to hold the cast and crew together and pull off the project was essential. Not only were the directors good at making and re-inventing stars, they were also quick to

cultivate their own director persona, which had a real function in the management and in the creative processes.

The author could also serve as the entering point to investigate the culture in which he was situated. Like a star, the typed director was also part of the meaning-making process and symptomatic of the society he lived in. As individuals in a network of ideological relations, together they represented the spectrum of local voices and the range of emotions. Their films recorded the affective dimension of Hong Kong history – how we felt and what our hopes and fears were – which might otherwise be dismissed, forgotten or suppressed in official documents. John Downing attributes the thriving of alternative media in times of political and economic turmoil to the needs of the audience. To explain Hong Kong cinema's thriving in times of political anxiety I would paraphrase Downing and say, "Whenever mainstream media industry forms like global or national cinemas choose not to represent important facets of social or political reality, an alternative industry form like the transnational Hong Kong cinema flourished. Hong Kong cinema's shoddy productions were seized upon and shared by many people when the need was real."[104] These situated authors, like stars selected by the audience to stay in the market, indicated the socio-cultural impetus of Hong Kong cinema.

Hong Kong cinema was neither a vocal alternative media nor a silent subaltern. Hong Kong cinema was not a replica of Hollywood and it certainly was not a radical alternative to Hollywood in Downing's definition of alternative media. But it was not a subaltern denied of representation either. The post-colonial studies' subaltern view, adopted by studies on Hong Kong culture in the 1980s and 1990s, positioning Hong Kong as in-between and in a vertical relation to the two dominant colonizing cultures – Britain and China, overshadows other variable readings, overlooking the complicated dynamics of the intra-local and inter-local. The subaltern view cannot explain how and

why Hong Kong cinema found a voice in the world market. If the typed directors branded themselves as auteurs above the constraints of Hong Kong cinema's commercial system, Hong Kong was itself branded by tourist associations and various forces as a city above its colonial status. The discursively constructed image of the city by popular media was not that of a silent subaltern. The subaltern view could not explain popularity of this urban cinema, the desirability of Hong Kong stars and the cult status of Hong Kong auteur directors. In the 1990s Hong Kong cinema entered a different phase, one that was profoundly affected by the way Hong Kong filmmakers had responded to the traumatic event of 1989. In the face of Hong Kong's sovereignty change, Hong Kong cinema dealt with the hierarchal concept and discourse of "going back to one's roots", with the root supposed to reside in China. China quickened the pace of economic reforms and tried to integrate into the world capitalist system. When the Chinese government urged people to "look forward", Hong Kong filmmakers insisted on looking "downward" (the dreams of people at the bottom), "backward" (an imagined coherent local history), and "inward" (a self-reflexive introspection). What dream was sold in this petite industry of a colonial city? What story did Hong Kong cinema tell?

Hong Kong cinema spoke about a peculiar local condition I call "orphan island anxiety," a paradoxical state in which political anxiety was combined and commensurate with economic prosperity. The more prosperous the city became the more insecure and threatened the people felt. In Chinese history "the Orphan Island period" refers to Shanghai under Japanese occupation but before Japan declared war with the Western allies on December 1941. Shanghai's Western concession areas at that time experienced a paradoxical phenomenon. In contrast to the rest of the country, there was stability and phenomenal prosperity. They were like "islands" in the "sea" of Japanese occupied territory. But on the other hand there was anxiety bubbling underneath regarding the

imminent war and the anticipated passing of prosperity. In 1939 director Cai Chusheng fled to Hong Kong and made *Orphan Island Paradise*, depicting the decadent lives of people in Shanghai's Western concession during that period. I borrow the term "orphan island" to refer to Hong Kong as a city of Western concession enjoying stability and prosperity amidst intense political anxiety. Hong Kong was an orphan island in an age of the universal and normative idea of the nation. It was a sub-sovereign city and yet enjoyed a high level of autonomy. Hong Kong cinema provided the transnational space to convey such an "islander" cultural sensibility which was not represented in global Hollywood and Chinese national cinema.

During the transition period, the official description of Hong Kong was "stability and prosperity." But as we shall see Wong Jing and Tsui Hark s movies were stories about "the family ruined and the country conquered" and Wong Kar Wai's characters mostly stay in motels and hotels. Beneath the appearance of a cosmopolitan city there is no place their characters can call home. Coincidentally their protagonists are all orphans or motherless in the decade when Hong Kong was about to return to the motherland. "A child without a mother, an adult without a motherland" Lo Wai Luk's description of Hong Kong New Wave director Ann Hui's oeuvre can be generalized to the works of these male directors. The following three case studies illustrate how each filmmaker played to his strengths to operate efficiently in the system, but generated a distinctive film style and expressed diverse visions.

Chapter 6 Wong Jing The Sober Dreamer

Wong Jing was the top domestic box office director in the 1990s. From 1990 to 1996 he directed 34 films, and his total gross was 635 million HKD which was 20% of the total gross of Hong Kong films (C. W. Chan "Rank"). He was dubbed “the King of Crappy Cinema”. His films were so formulaic and distinctive that in Hong Kong his name “Wong Jing” was often used as an adjective to refer to a certain type of Hong Kong formulaic gimmicky shoddy productions. In the 1990s Wong Jing was unabashedly sloppy. When asked to rate his movies, he gives an 85. He says, “For a movie of 85, we charge 36 dollars for a ticket. For a movie of 100, we also charge 36 dollars. There is no need to work to 100” (H. He 32). He created some puzzling phenomena in Hong Kong. There was the peculiar behavior of Wong Jing’s audiences, as pointed out by He Huixian in her interview with him in 1992. In the screening hall the audience would curse and ridicule the illogicality and absurdity of the plots while watching and laughing. But they would buy tickets again to watch his next movie (H. He). In the competitive environment of the 1990s Wong Jing’s movies were still mostly formulaic productions which still adopted the traditional mode of financing, the cash based *pianhua* system. He still scribbled the script on a tiny piece of paper and improvised on the set. Despite the expansion of the budget, he still finished shooting and editing in a rush. Since the early years of his film career he was routinely criticized for the vulgarity in his films, and in the late 1990s his movies were still filled with bathroom jokes. Nevertheless, Wong Jing’s market share in Hong Kong was impressive. For example in 1994 alone he was involved in 10 films as producer, director and writer. The total gross of his films was 150 million (HKD) which was 16% of the total domestic box office (J. Zhang "Hong Kong"). When the industry was in a dire situation in 1995, Wong Jing still had no problem launching

new projects. Some admitted that his low budget mass production system was a viable way to survive, but Wong Jing was not respected by his peers (J. Zhang "Wong Jing"). His films were rarely nominated in the Hong Kong Film Awards, an award by professional peers in the industry. But local film critics' incessant censure didn't diminish his career. In 2010, Sek Kei, a veteran film critic whom Wong Jing respects[105] but who severely criticizes his trifling and lousy films calls Wong Jing "the roly-poly of Hong Kong cinema" because Wong Jing continues making movies whether Hong Kong film industry is in a boom or bust phase (Sek).

Wong Jing's trademark genre is the gambler film, which he has developed since his early years in television. His *God of Gamblers* (1989) starring Chow Yun Fat was the top box office hit of that year, spawning off an entire decade of gambler films (see table 6.2). Typical of the exploitation tradition of Hong Kong cinema, shortly after the success of *God of Gamblers* there was a few dozen sequels, series and copycats with the stock characters played by the same actors across an enterprise of gambler films by various directors.106 Amidst hundreds of gambler films throughout the history of Hong Kong cinema, *God of Gamblers* is regarded as a classic and Wong Jing is regarded as the master of this genre. The series were all shown during the Christmas holidays (see table 6.1) and is about a professional gambler in casino. In clinical terms, his protagonist is a problematic or pathological gambler who engages in gambling to the point of ruining his family and his own life.[107] And there is evidence of a higher frequency of gambling problems among individuals in a casino setting (Fong). In American culture, gambling may be viewed by some as a deviant and disruptive activity, but as a form of risk taking it is culturally valued, since various types of risk taking such as financial investments are positively valued, as Thomas M. Holtgraves argues. Holtgraves says, the positive character implication is one that is not overly cautious but is capable of taking risks. But

in Chinese societies, as Chien and Hsu point out, gambling is perceived as a vice that will lead some to "become the pawns of destiny", despite the findings that the Chinese are higher risk takers. It is regarded as a pastime that needs to be condemned. Macau is now "Asia's casino mecca". But as Glenn McCartney points out, gambling in Macau has been portrayed in a negative light and Macau has gained the image of a wicked city. And one of the arguments to justify the legalization of casinos in Macau is that it generates tax revenues and contributions to social and infrastructure projects. McCartney also points out that Hong Kong was not turned into a casino city by its sovereign power in the 1860s like Macau was "because of England's dismay and disdain for the large 'profits of vice' being generated in Hong Kong" (39). Thus gambling houses were closed down and casino gambling is still illegal in the former British colony. No legal gambling takes place in the mainland China. At present, Macau receives a constant flow of gamblers from Hong Kong and China. In Hong Kong, gambling is often framed as a problematic behavior that the government, education and parents need to fix.[108] There is no similar positive cultural value attached to gambling like in the U.S. Yet Wong Jing was able to construct an honorable character in a base profession of a stigmatized activity in a base genre. He has all his protagonists coming from marginal Chinese territories: Macau the wicked city (the Casino Tycoon series), Hong Kong the cultural desert (the *God of Gamblers* series) and Guangzhou the periphery Southern Chinese province (the Saint of Gamblers series). More intriguing is that the protagonists of these holiday season mass entertainments are tragic heroes. For example, in the *God of Gamblers* series, the protagonist's father, his unborn child, girlfriend, fiancé and wife are all killed. His mentor, sworn brother and cousin all betray him. How did Wong Jing prosper in the competitive environment of the 1990s with a dated mode of production and formulaic films amidst his critics' condemnation? How did he even survive all these years among

the few thousands of low budget quickies and hundreds of trash movie directors in the history of Hong Kong cinema? What was the appeal of his movies that kept audiences coming back for more? What was the Hong Kong story he tells with his trademark gambler films?

Wong Jing has had a long, prolific and consistently commercially successful career since 1975. His first film *Challenge of the Gamesters* (1981) is a gambler film. Since then he has asserted himself as an entertainer for the masses. He has survived well in the system of Hong Kong cinema for mass entertainment of the early 1980s. He has laid a good foundation in industry connection, built a good business reputation, and sharpened his skills in genre and the star system. He is industry-savvy and fits well in Hong Kong film industry's exhibition sector-led production approach. By the 1990s his brand "Wong Jing" was so established that his filmmaking style, the gambler genre, the stars' performance and narrative style, all bear his trademark. But it is his unique voice and vision that gives him the leverage to be a champion in the market. Despite his high educational background in an elite education system in a colony, he looked at people at the bottom of the society and dealt with their dreams and anxiety. His gambler films invariably tell the same story over and over again: an honorable man in a base profession from a marginal place defies destiny and emerges as a champion in the capitalist jungle by honoring the traditional moral code.

"WONG JING" AS A SAFE BET

The early years of his career has enabled Wong Jing to thrive in the 1990s. In Hong Kong cinema's financier-exhibition sector-led productions, he has survived by being and projecting an image as a safe bet to his financial supporters, and a guarantee of entertainment to his audiences. Back then there was no government funding committee or academic attention given to Hong Kong movies. The discourse sector, that is the film

critics' response, was not a factor in Wong Jing's calculations. The financing and exhibition sectors were the key parts in his game. Very early on Wong Jing had set his goal as an entertainer for the masses and has never wavered since then. He always keeps a smiley face in public and is always the center of the party. He was born Wong Yat Cheong in 1955 in Hong Kong. He says, shortly after his birth, his father had to do some shooting in Japan, a faraway place for Hong Kong people at that time. The family was worried and named the son "Yat Cheong" meaning "a safe journey to Japan" (Shin *Wong Jing*). Names of that generation of filmmakers often indicate the itinerant character of their formative years and their parents' longing for peace and security and wishes for assurance. For example, Jackie Chan's Chinese birth name "Kong-sang" means "born in Hong Kong"; Nansun Shi's first name means "born in the South"; Yuen Woo-ping's first name means "peace" because he was born in the year of the end of the Sino-Japanese war (Cindy S.C. Chan "Yuan Woo-Ping"). For that generation of filmmakers adopting a stage name was a common practice. Wong Yat Cheong named himself "Wong Jing" when he started working in television. After a summer internship Wong Yat Cheong went back to university and Wong Jing stayed in television. In his journey in the Hong Kong television and film industries, Wong Jing takes a steady and reliable approach and strategizes as much as he can in this high-risk business.

In a 1981 interview by Film Bi-Weekly for his very first feature film, Wong Jing already asserted himself as an entertainer for the masses amidst the rise of the Hong Kong New Wave generation's personal and socially relevant films. Since this film Wong Jing has been in an antagonistic position with local film critics. He says, "Hong Kong film critics post themselves as intellectuals and look down upon pure entertainment films. They only regard art film as admirable. Directors of art and commercial film have to put in a lot of effort and overcome many difficulties. Both of them should be respected. It's

like there are two chefs. One makes buns in restaurant for the mass and the other works for the Royal Jockey Club cooking delicatessen for the Taipan. They both work hard. Their processes are different but their goals are the same." He made his stand very clear, "I don't like my film to be message-loaded. I only want to provide pure entertainment" (N. Shan 24). The writer of the interview ends the article with four words, "This is Wong Jing" indicative of Wong Jing's distinctive image and style in his very first film. In the next twenty years amidst the rise of another wave of art film directors like Wong Kar Wai, Fruit Chan, Stanley Kwan and Clara Law, Wong Jing continued to be the commercial film director the critics love to criticize, keeping his name a constant presence in their film review columns. In 2001, in an interview by the same film magazine Wong Jing asserted the same, "I am an entertainer." He says, "I never 'love' my movies. I only make those movies with a professional attitude" (Ernie Au 38). He was an irrevocably commercial film entertainer from day one.

Wong Jing always pledges his allegiance to his financial supporters and assures them of his reliability. In an interview article in 1992 titled "Box office panacea – Wong Jing" Wong Jing asserts his role as a commercial film director. He says, "To me film is absolutely not an art. It is a commercial product. Everybody should regard it as a money-making tool. If not, he should not work in this industry. Filmmaking is teamwork. Film is a commercial product at every stage: production, distribution and promotion." He expounds his code of conduct: "I think if you want to make personal art, you should not spend the investor's money to fulfill your own desire. This is very selfish and unethical. Neglecting the investor's interest is dishonest behavior" (H. He 32). Wong Jing asserts that he is always fair to the people he works with and for. He proudly says, "I did the best within the budget allowed" (Ernie Au 38). In the 1990s when unethical producers who ran away with the last installment of payments became common as the industry

deteriorated, Wong Jing had a reputation for being punctual in payment even when it meant paying out of his pocket. He says, “In our field, this is our code of conduct. Without honoring this, my reputation will be ruined” (Cindy S.C. Chan "Wong Jing"). In 2001, 20 years in the business he is also proud to claim that he never cheated anyone out of his money. He says, “With my ‘Wong Jing’ fame, I can easily cheat people’s money. But I didn’t do that. For any business, the most important thing is reputation. If you keep your promise and deliver, even if some day you fail, there is always someone to give you a helping hand” (Ernie Au 38). In his own analysis of his competitive advantage among fellow filmmakers, Wong Jing says it is due to his good interpersonal relationships and reputation. He proudly says, “I have a very good relationship with every sector. With my financial supporters’ trust, I have an easier time in managing the cash flow and that makes a huge difference” (Cindy S.C. Chan "Wong Jing") Columnist Zhang Jian notes that Wong Jing was operating like an independent production house, but he has extensive connections with financial backing. Wong Jing was associated with the big company Win’s Film. He also got financial backing from Golden Harvest, Shaw studio, and two major financiers from Taiwan (J. Zhang "Hong Kong"). In a tightly knit business community relying on the traditional cash-based *pianhua* financing system, a good reputation is essential for survival. This generation of filmmakers is conditioned to watch out for their investors’ interest as if with their own family purse. They have been operating with skeleton crews since the demise of the studios. It is not a surprise that many of them find Hollywood production or China co-production big crew sizes wasteful, redundant and even burdensome.

Wong Jing is conscious of building his image as an unbeatable survivor in the business. Hong Kong film critics always compare him with Roger Corman, the American B movie director and conclude that Wong Jing’s basic rule of survival is: so long as he

doesn't lose money, he can keep on working (D. Lin "Wong Jing"). Wong Jing gave people the impression of his being invincible in the market: "He is smart and pragmatic. His financiers never have to worry about him over budget" (Jiang). He is like a roly-poly who bounces back when beaten as Sek Kei says. Wong Jing admits that, "A lot of people think that I am very tough. In fact, I was hurt before. It's just that I didn't cry after falling. I wiped away my blood and no one noticed" (Jiang). And then he falls silent about the injuries and lost battles. In an era when there was still a distinction in the industry between the college educated filmmakers and the "red trouser" filmmakers (trained in traditional apprentice system) Wong Jing tried to project a tough guy image and yet retain his amicable look as an entertainer. He majored in Chinese at the Chinese University of Hong Kong but he always suppressed his elite education background and even dismissed his university training as useless. But in a 2007 interview at the Hong Kong Film Archive for an oral history project on his father Wong Tin Lam, he opened up and talked about his childhood and his father's influence on him (Shin *Wong Jing*). Wong Jing worked as an intern at TVB where his father was a prominent producer. He says his father was smart not to let his son work under him, in order to avoid criticism and office politicking. Wong Tin Lam was a prominent film director before migrating to television. Film directors Ringo Lam and Johnnie To are two of his prominent protégés at TVB. Wong Tin Lam was well respected in the Hong Kong television and film industries.

The Hong Kong Film Archive interview of Wong Jing was done with his father by his side. In contrast to his image as entertainer for the masses and life of the party, there he describes himself as a lonely boy growing up reading avidly in his father's study room. At age 7 to 8 he already finished reading the Chinese classic Water Margin; at age 11 he finished reading Louis Cha (Jin Yong)'s novels; He also read various popular writers' works; everyday he read two newspapers. He proudly says that his training in

Chinese was very solid at a young age. He says at age 8 to 9 he already started reading his father's scripts. At age 15, he always reviewed his father's scripts and gave comments like, "This is too old-fashion…that is too cliché…this is revenge for the father plot again…" (Shin *Wong Jing* 98). In that interview he even mentioned his involvement in drama theatre (an elite art form in Hong Kong) at Pui Ching Middle School (one of the few schools that adopted Chinese as the language of instruction in colonial Hong Kong.) He restarted the drama society that was established by Chung King Fai, who is now "the guru of Hong Kong theatre" with 60 years of stage experience (Tao *Chung King Fai*). Chung King Fai played the mentor Kent in *God of Gamblers 3: The Early Stage* (1997). Stanley Kwan was Wong Jing's school friend at Pui Ching. Wong Jing produced Stanley Kwan's award winning film *Hold You Tight* (1998).[109]

In 2002 when I asked him why he didn't put his name on those refined movies he produced, he frankly says that "Wong Jing" is not the suitable "brand" for those movies. He specifically used the term "brand" to refer to "Wong Jing". He was conscious of branding himself and training himself to be industry savvy. He learned from his father's "mistake". He says his father's biggest influence on him was not on filmmaking technique, but on how to survive in this industry. He says, "My father is like a mirror for me. He teaches me on how to survive in this industry without being bullied and taken advantage of" (Cindy S.C. Chan "Wong Jing") Seeing the ups and downs of his father's career, Wong Jing comments about his father being "silly" and he learned the importance of building one's image. He says,

> "My father worked at many positions. He worked with the title of assistant director but finished shooting the entire movie by himself. The director just took the credit without doing anything. Later when my father became established and famous, he didn't fight for a better deal for himself. He worked hard without promoting himself. He didn't give himself more media exposure and build up his image. There was a period of time he was between jobs and worried. It wasn't

> until he moved to the TV industry that he started a new page in his career. He was silly but he had his luck. He was well respected by many people. I'm different from him. I know how to seize the opportunity. I learned his virtues. I want to work as hard as him. But I'm also an opportunist."(Cindy S.C. Chan "Wong Jing")

But Wong Jing seizes opportunity not by grabbing more credit for his work, but by selecting credits suitable for the image he has constructed. He says, "I am the executive producer of Ringo Lam's *Full Alert* (1997). But my comedy image and Ringo Lam's masculine action film image are too ingrained in people's minds that it will be confusing to combine our names together. The audience doesn't know what to expect of the film. Like *Hold You Tight* (1998) and the *Young and Dangerous* series, I let the others take the credit. I'm also heavily involved in *The Stormriders* (Andrew Lau, 1998) and *A Man Called Hero* (Andrew Lau, 1999), but I didn't put my name on them" (Cindy S.C. Chan "Wong Jing"). The "Wong Jing" on the rolling credits is half of the story. In an interview article in 1996 titled "Wong Jing straddles between art and commerce" the writer describes how Wong Jing carefully manages what to show to public. Wong Jing says, "You can only see what's on the surface of the screen. You can't see what's behind it. What the audience see is half true half false. What they see seems real, but it really is not. Because what they see is only the 180 degrees of a sphere" (Alge 52). In recent years he produced Ann Hui's socially relevant films *The Way We Are* (2008)[110] and *Night and Fog* (2009) in which his role as executive producer is better known in the media now. Being a successful director was not Wong Jing's ultimate goal. In an interview in 1997 he says, "From the very beginning, director is only a transitional job for me. But that transition has taken me 15 to 16 years. When I worked at TVB, I was responsible for creative, co-ordination and executive works. When I entered the film industry, I knew I wouldn't have the power to command other directors if I did not have the experience as a director" (Z. Liu 11). In 2002, he describes his role not as a director or producer. He says,

"I am a maker. I make things happen. I source the funding, find the suitable director and match the cast and crew. I initiate the project until it is ready for production, then I hand it to the executive producers" (Cindy S.C. Chan "Wong Jing").

It took Wong Jing years of hard work, skill, strategies and jungle training to get to that filmmaker position. Wong Jing is known for being hardworking and prolific. He has accomplished a lot since his 20s and he paid a price for that. In an interview in 1995 the writer did not list Wong Jing's impressive box office performance like most reporters did. Instead the opening subtitle is "Wong Jing's real name is medicine pill" and then the writer goes on to describe the strong smell of Chinese medicines and show photos of the herb tea and medicine pills displayed in his office. She observes that Wong Jing was just 40 years old then but his health had already deteriorated badly. In 1981 at age 26 Wong Jing made his first feature film, which was one of the top ten hits of that year. In 1989 at age 34, he made *God of Gamblers* which was the top box office of that year. Wong Jing describes how exhausted he felt in those years. He says, "There was one time I fell asleep in the hall while holding onto the water cooler. In 1984 during the shooting of *Prince Charming*, I instantly felt asleep when I leaned on a bamboo behind me." But Wong Jing was not complaining about the harsh and exploitative conditions. In fact he was presenting how extremely hardworking he was, a virtue he admires in his father. He also liked to talk about how he survived in a jungle-like environment. He says in 1975 when he started as an intern at TVB, "I didn't plan to work for long there. But they had a labor shortage. So I decided to spend my four months' summer vacation there. I would make them feel they couldn't do without me…I took up all the positions. Whoever didn't like doing his work, I would take over. I worked on scripts, skits, and gags. I gave my all" (L. Pan 24-25). In my interview with him, he relishes his battles in TVB and Shaw studio. Inside TVB there was the emergence of the "film unit" which later evolved into the Hong

Kong New Wave filmmakers. Outside TVB there was the challenge from the rival TV stations. There were talent raids and severe labor shortages at TVB. Wong Jing describes, for the variety show *Enjoy Yourself Tonight*, shown five days a week, the demand for skits was tremendous. The average length of a drama serial at that time was about 60 to 110 episodes, also shown five days a week. But there were only about 10 writers in the scripting department. In contrast, the "film unit" of TVB, under Salina Chow's leadership and protection only had to produce a few hours of shows with more than 20 shooting days and unlimited resources. Wong Jing calls them the "privileged class". He clarifies that Tsui Hark, a prolific filmmaker, did not come from the "film unit", but Patrick Tam (Wong Kar Wai's mentor) did. He says he was so useful in TVB's rating battle that he was allowed to break the division between the creative and production departments, and had easy access to the manager in that hierarchical organization. When he entered the Shaw studio, prominent directors like Li Han-hsiang, Chang Cheh and Lau Kar Leung were still working there (Cindy S.C. Chan "Wong Jing"). In order to face the challenge from the New Wave, the Shaw studio started to recruit younger directors. But Shaw's culture was intimidating to young directors even though Wong Jing was established in television. Bullying on the set was not uncommon. In an Hong Kong Film Archive interview Wong Jing describes how he started his first day of shooting. He says, "My Papa stayed on the set with me for three days. I said to him, 'You come to the set and just sit there. I want everyone to know that I'm your son. I don't want to have a light accidentally dropped from the rail.' That means I didn't want anyone intimidate me. In the end no planned accident happened. My Papa just sat there chatting with people" (Shin *Wong Jing* 102). Wong Jing says he signed a contract with the Shaw studio with the lowest salary, but with a bonus provision; he ended up receiving the highest bonus in Shaw's history. Wong Jing describes that the Shaw studio at that time was a jungle.

In the jungle eras of TVB and the Shaw studio, Wong Jing developed his efficient methods of operation, especially in scriptwriting and characterization. He says he has his own theory and formula for writing scripts: “With my formula, I can write very fast and in a mechanical way. I don’t need to wait for inspiration and yet maintain certain standard. When you have inspiration, you can write better. When you don’t, you can still come up with a story with a decent structure. This is what helps me write so fast. I can finish a script in a few days” (Cindy S.C. Chan "Wong Jing"). He finished his first feature film script in 1978 and in the space of 10 years he has finished over 40 scripts (L. Pan). Being able to write a script on the fly was essential for Wong Jing to capitalize on hit movies in the 1990s.

Wong Jing’s movies look so formulaic that in a feature article a writer summarized the two major plots that Wong Jing uses in all of his films, which he says are the essence of Shakespeare’s stories: “The drama that derives from lower class people with high moral value is tragedy; the drama from upper class people with low moral values is comedy” (D. Lin "Wong Jing"). But the narrative structure of Wong Jing’s gambler films is more culturally specific. Wong Jing adopts the most traditional and accessible narrative structure for his mass audience gambler genre films. The stories of this genre look so simple and familiar that Wu Yufu summarizes the narrative structure and genre conventions of the gambler films from 1989 to 2000 in a few paragraphs. Wu says these genre films usually follow the traditional Chinese four step composition: qi-cheng-zhuan-he (introduction, elucidation of the theme, transition to another viewpoint and summing up). And the plot usually goes like this: the protagonist is a champion in the gambling field and intends to retire; the antagonist puts him in danger; the protagonist gets out of danger with the help of a young man he meets during his down time; the young man discovers his real identity and he takes the young man on as his protégé. The

ending is: the reluctant hero comes back for a final contest, gets revenge and wins. Wu also points out that the Hong Kong gambling film in general is a male-dominant genre with the male protagonist moving the mission plot and the female protagonist remaining passive in the romance plot. As in Hong Kong martial arts films, male bonding, rather than the man-woman romance is the core relationship in Wong Jing's gambler films. But Wu hasn't pointed out that Wong Jing's gambler film is indeed a wuxia (martial arts) story, moved to the casino setting with the traditional moral code of human relationships embedded in it. In traditional martial art films, the chivalric protagonist is not materialistic. He will not get any financial gain from his profession and he only fights or kills for righteous reasons. In one of Wong Jing's gambler films, for example, Little Knife (the knight of gamblers, Andy Lau) listens to his mentor and has to use all of his gambling gains for a charitable purpose. In the saint of gambler series, Sing (Stephen Chow) and his uncle (Ng Mang-tat) instantly get bad karma when they use the money for self-interest. Even though gambling is an activity associated with greed, Wong Jing's gambler films revolve around the theme of revenge and championship, and money is not an issue. The casino, like jianghu (the martial world) as an alternative realm parallel to the imperial court, and has its own moral code and rules of the game. Wong Jing puts the old martial arts genre into the new bottle of the modern casino.

Wong Jing also applies this recycling approach to characterization. In his gambler films, the protagonist and his sidekick are from character prototypes he developed during his TV days. He uses his television industry's factory training to strengthen his efficiency in developing characters who are particularly appealing to local audiences. Television scripts require mass appeal and potential for series and sequels. TVB in the 1970s to 1990s often had 70-80% of the domestic market, and its target audience was 4 to 80 years old family viewers. Wong Jing says a TV story must have the family relationship as the

basic structure. In Hong Kong back in the 1980s, the TV serial was shown five days a week at prime time. To draw the audience to stick to his channel Wong Jing says his formula was: Monday and Tuesday are for the introduction of the story of that week and it must reach a climax on Friday. But the most important factor was "characterization". Wong Jing explained, "The key in a serial is not the plot device, but the characters. Audience will follow the characters' personality development, not the development of the events. Audience cares about what happen to the character" (Jiang). Characters are the main attraction of Wong Jing's gamblers films.

Two of the most memorable characters that Wong Jing created in his TV days are Lam Ah Chun and Ah Tsan, and they form the prototypes for Wong Jing's gambler film characters: the protagonist and his sidekick. *Lam Ah Chun* is a series comedy about an overeducated Plain Jane returning from overseas. She humbly works as an assistant in a small company. She does not exactly fit into the modern Hong Kong asphalt jungle but she survives. Lam Ah Chun was played by glamorous Cantonese cinema star Josephine Siao. Siao was "demoted" to play a Plain Jane wearing a bobbed hairdo, thick eye glasses, an over-sized shirt and jeans. When she returned from her overseas education in 1973, Siao was dubbed by the media as "a star with a bachelor degree". In those days in Hong Kong's colonial elite education system, having a university education was rare. Women having a university education and from overseas was even more rare. A top female movie star pursuing a higher education was much rarer. Siao reinvented her star persona and her career. She also worked behind the screen as a producer for independent productions. Wong Jing's gambler protagonists bear a striking resemblance to Lam Ah Chun. Josephine Siao is a star working from behind the screen. Lam Ah Chun is played by a star hiding her beauty and glamor behind the thick eyeglasses, a high caliber worker but with a humble attitude and golden-heart. It is like the Chinese saying: a man of great

wisdom often appears to be slow-witted. The theme of concealing one's real identity, covering one's true ability, keeping a low profile, laying low or pretending one is ignorant often recurs in Wong Jing's protagonists. For example, in *God of Gamblers*, Ko Chun pretends that he didn't remember Little Knife and knows nothing about his cousin's plot to kill him. In the prequel, he pretends that he still has a brain injury and can't function normally. His enemy spares his life. In the *Casino Tycoon* series Hsin pretends to have heart attack to rest and hide in a hospital. In *My Name is Nobody*, No-Name pretends that he is still blind due to a brain injury. His opponent spares his life and underestimates his ability to seek revenge. *The Conman* series is all about tricks and deception. In *The Tricky Master* the undercover cop's supervisor is the Masked Man, "a man with a thousand faces". Wong Jing's gambler protagonists always hide their true identity or assume a fake identity.

The prototype for the sidekick is Ah Tsan, a side character from a 1979 television serial *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly* (TVB). Wong Jing says they had three actors to choose from but he insisted Liu Wai-Hung, an unknown actor, play Ah Tsan and worked the script around him (Cindy S.C. Chan "Wong Jing"). Liu Wai-Hung shot to fame with this character and still uses his character name Ah Tsan today. In the 1980s, the name "Ah Tsan" was understood by Hong Kong citizens to signify a hillbilly cousin from China. The character is a naïve, gullible and money-minded new immigrant from China who has unrealistic dreams of getting instantly rich in Hong Kong. But the character is also depicted as simple-minded and kind-hearted. The sidekick comic characters in Wong Jing's gambler films are a variation of Ah Tsan. For example, Nat Chan in *The Conman in Vegas* (1999), Alex Man in the *Casino Tycoon* series (1992) and Ng Mang-tat in the Saint of Gamblers series. Like Ah Tsan, he is obviously flawed, delusional about fame, wealth and beauty. In contrast to the sophisticated protagonist, he does not pretend. He is

associated with primitive desire and is openly lusty and vulgar. But he is also a lovable underdog, kind-hearted and loyal. For example, in *The Conman in Vegas*, the Nat Chan character is always trapped by a beautiful woman spy. He's the character who delivers all the bathroom jokes. In the *Casino Tycoon* series, Kuo Ying-nan (Alex Man) is the protagonist Hsin (Andy Lau)'s childhood friend and he and his son always stand by Hsin. He is lusty, vulgar, unsophisticated and uneducated, in sharp contrast to Hsin. His defects in English and the Chinese language are a running gag. In the saint of gambler series, Ng Mang-tat plays Sing's uncle. He is greedy and lusty. He always thinks of using Sing's supernatural power to get wealthy. He has a comic disability: whenever Sing calls him "Uncle Three" he will lose control and hop on anyone, man or woman, nearby. In *Back to Shanghai*, Ng Mang-tat plays Sing's grandfather. There is an entire sequence emphasizing him being a sissy, even though he is a triad member in Shanghai during a turbulent time. At a critical moment, it's this sissy grandfather who believes in Sing's impossible story and helps him. Wong Jing's description of his own character Lolanto, the title character of a comedy *I love Lolanto* (1984), best illustrates the essence of this prototype. Wong Jing says, "This Lolanto character captures the image of Hong Kong's lower middle class people. This character is materialistic, pragmatic, stingy, and refuses to be taken advantage of. He has no political leanings or social perspective, but he has his own value standards and attitudes. He has a unique Hong Kong people's view of *yi* (the code of brotherhood or moral code). On small matters he is ruthless, but when it comes to the critical moment, he is a righteous man" (Luo). Wong Jing has his formula for characterization and he is well versed in the star system. He is familiar with many Hong Kong stars and has his own efficient way of using stars.

Wong Jing says, "When I started the project *God of Gamblers*, I knew Chow Yun Fat would play the role. I worked with Chow Yun Fat a lot. Everyone says he is a good

actor. I don't agree. In fact, he has only three basic stock looks. It is like the three primary colors in television that generate varieties of colors on screen. The first one is the smart Hui Man-keung character in *The Bund* (1980). The second one is the serious gentleman in *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly* (1979). The third is a comic thug character. Chow Yun Fat combines and matches them so well that it looks like he has a wide range of expressions. I know the first and last ones are Chow Yun Fat's best. I used them in *God of Gamblers*: the smart look when he's the champion and the silly look after he has the brain injury" (Cindy S.C. Chan "Wong Jing"). Wong Jing is a strong supporter of the star system even though many filmmakers blamed the stars' high prices for bringing down the industry. Wong Jing says, "Star system will never collapse…How can you do film business without a star?...It is healthier to the film industry to have stars. Financiers have more confidence and there will be more investment and thus more productions. Every profession needs a star." But his concept of the star system is confined to traditional commercial filmmaking. He was the director of Maggie Cheung's first film and the two have been good friends since then. In 1992 Wong Jing said, "Maggie Cheung comes back to make film with me even after getting the best actress award at Berlin film festival. You have to understand that the audience is your vitamin. They support your life. An award cannot support you. It can only be a burden to you" (H. He 32). Wong Jing did not spend time and effort to re-invent or explore new dimensions of stars. He has his most efficient way of using a star: he capitalizes on the star's existing persona, captures his/her best parts and mixes and matches well. It is like the way he modifies his character prototypes: mixing and matching them well. What remains constant is that the smart protagonist who assumes different identities, and the vulgar sidekick who provides the comic relief and affirms the moral bottom-line.

GAMBLER GENRE AS PERFORMANCE OF HONG KONG IDENTITY

In his study of why people gamble, Thomas M. Holtgraves argues that one of the attractions of gambling is the opportunity to present to oneself and to others a desired identity. Gambling is a type of self-presentation, an activity that implicates a desirable identity. Holtgraves writes, "…gambling is a fateful activity and so differs in important ways from other 'inconsequential' social settings…it is only fateful activities (risk taking in general and gambling in particular) that allow for the expression of 'character.' That is, it is only when the outcomes of an activity are consequential and problematic that character judgments are possible at all. Some of the bases for strong character implications in all fateful situations are courage, gameness, integrity and composure. Because most everyday activities are uneventful and not fateful, individuals are not often given the chance to display character. One of the appeals of gambling, then, may be the opportunity for the display of character" (Holtgraves 82). Wong Jing's gambler genre can be read as an expression of character, a form of cultural expression, a mechanism of myth making and thus a performance of the desired Hong Kong identity. Gambling is a socially disapproved activity in Chinese society but Wong Jing packages his gambler protagonist as a glamorous hero.

In the 1990s, Hong Kong cinema was best known in the world market for its martial arts films, whether it's Tsui Hark's *wuxia* in costume or John Woo's weaponized wuxia, or Johnnie To and Ringo Lam's gangster version set in the asphalt jungle. Wong Jing says he's deeply influenced by *wuxia* film and Chang Cheh has a huge impact on him. John Chiang was his childhood idol and he loves the chivalry romanticism in wuxia film (H. He). Wong Jing's also sets his *jianghu* (the martial art world) in the asphalt jungle, but he deals with the double-ness of Hong Kong identity with mixtures of comedy. Wong Jing's gambler films illustrate what Marana May Szeto calls "Petit-

grandiose Hong Kongism", a kind of inferiority-superiority response to Hong Kong's coloniality. (see chapter 2). On the one hand there is a feeling of superiority for Hong Kong. In the sequel, Wong Jing even has a police officer from China blatantly praising Hong Kong's prosperity and superior capitalist system. On the other hand, the protagonist is always surrounded by danger and put in a vulnerable position. The interesting point about the antagonists in Wong Jing's gambler films is that they are all Chinese and are from other societies. His protagonist is pursuing a world championship, but the challenge is not from an alien race or from non-Chinese societies. Wong Jing is dealing with the Hong Kong identity not just in a vertical relationship with China and Britain, but an inter-local and intra-Chinese relationship. Wong Jing's gambler films play with the performativity of the Hong Kong Chinese identity. For example, in *God of Gamblers III: Back to Shanghai* the main part of the movie is a back to the future sequence where Sing (saint of gamblers) visits his grandparents in Shanghai in the 1930-40s. The ultimate antagonist is a woman Yoshiko Kawashima. In Chinese history Kawashima was executed as a traitor ("*hanjian*") by the Nationalist government after the Sino-Japanese war. But she was not even a Han Chinese. She was from a noble class of Manchuria and was adopted by a Japanese family.[111] Before the Qing dynasty, Manchurians were regarded as an alien race, not Chinese. Kawashima's character, with her dressing in a male military captain's uniform, is based on another Hong Kong movie.[112] Opposite Kawashima is the gangster head Ding Lik, a fictional character from a popular Hong Kong television series *The Bund* (1980) set in Shanghai. In Wong Jing's film version, he lives a luxurious life in the French concession in Shanghai during the orphan island period. He receives Sing warmly because Sing killed the enemy of his sworn brother Hui Man-keung. He is an apolitical character. His actions have nothing to do with nationalism or anti-Japanese militarism. He is just a gangster out for his own self-interests, and he is loyal to his sworn

brother and male friend to the point of giving away his fiancé to his newly met friend. In the original TV series Chow Yun Fat plays Hui Man-keung, a university student-turned gangster head. Wong Jing says Ko Chun's hair style and look is a replica of Hui Man-keung (Cindy S.C. Chan "Wong Jing"). In the *Casino Tycoon* series Wong Jing's protagonist is another university-student-turned-thug. Hsin works his way up and becomes the number one in Macau's casino business. But when he is cornered in a board meeting, he boldly asserts his ability to play rough and tough. He says to his opponents, "I just have to take off my tie and I can deal with you like a thug." Wong Jing's gambler protagonist is his projection of a flexible identity, one who can easily move up and down the social ladder, transcend his marginal status but having no problems going back to his grass-roots standing.

THE ORPHAN ISLAND FANTASIA

Like a star, Wong Jing as a typed director is elected by the audience to stay in the market not just because of his performance (how well he tells story or how efficiently he operates in the jungle), but also because of which story he repeatedly tells. Columnist You Qingyuan in his article titled "Appeal for Wong Jing" asserts that Wong Jing is the best B movie writer and director in Hong Kong and no other can master "low class taste" and ordinary people's fantasy better than he does. You Qingyuan asserts that "Wong Jing's Film" is a must for understanding Hong Kong cinema, especially of local popular culture, and the relationship between film and its era. The interview in 1981 for Wong Jing's first film foretells very well what fantasy Wong Jing would repeatedly sell in the next 20 years. Wong Jing says, "I always think that film is a 'dream factory'. It can give audience what they cannot get or see in real life; offer a hero to let them vent their frustration in real life. I set *Challenge of the Gamesters* in the Republican Era and make it as a metaphor of survival of the fittest in the jungle. People get into cut through

competition. And then there is an invincible hero who emerges from this" (23). The Republican Era is characterized by the sovereignty change from the Qing court to the Nationalist government, foreign invasion, anarchy and official corruption, war lords and civil wars. In 1981 when the issue of "1997" emerged and Sino-British talks started, Wong Jing made his first film about a world of deception in the Republican Era and an honorable hero emerging from that jungle. In 1989, in *God of Gamblers*, Wong Jing repeated the story and set it in contemporary Hong Kong.

Wong Jing's gamblers films best illustrate the ethos of the era, the mainstream cultural imaginary in response to Hong Kong's coloniality. On the one hand there is the optimism of Hong Kong's economic superiority over China. On the other hand there is the pessimism over China's political domination of Hong Kong. The Hong Kong people were not admitted in the Sino-British talks that decided their future. The island city was like an orphan with no sovereign state to account for its people's wellbeing. Wong Jing's gambler film genre is an orphan island fantasia: a wild dream about Hong Kong transcending its sub-sovereign status. Wong Jing's protagonist is often an orphan growing up to become a champion. He is the embodiment of "Hong Kong Wonder": a political midget recognized for its economic might. He is an honorable man from a marginal place who defies destiny and emerges as a champion with intelligence and integrity. In the prequel of *God of Gamblers*, the protagonist Ko Chun is originally from a well off family. His father is killed. He was kidnapped and becomes an orphan. His mentor adopts and trains him. He emerges as a master in gambling. In the *Casino Tycoon* series the protagonist Hsin is also originally from a well off family. He also becomes an orphan. His father also dies. His family fortune is gone. Due to circumstances he is also "demoted" to engage in coolie jobs and mixes with thugs. After being humiliated by his relative as a child, he becomes determined to get rich. In the end he becomes a casino

tycoon in Macau. In *My Name is Nobody*, No-Name is also an orphan who emerges as a champion. Wong Jing's protagonists are able to control even something as random as gambling by skills, technique and supernatural power. Wong Jing's entertainment films tell where we want to escape to: to be champion in the world, to be recognized despite our marginal status.

Interestingly, while giving the audience the illusion of autonomy and control over one's fate, Wong Jing also underhandedly tells their worst nightmare: the family ruined. In the *God of Gambler* series (*God of Gamblers*, *God of Gamblers Returns* and *God of Gamblers 3: the Early Stage*), the protagonist Ko Chun (Chow Yun Fat and Leon Lai)'s father, child, girlfriend, fiancé, and wife are invariably killed at home. In the *Casino Tycoon* series, the protagonist Hsin's son killed another son and the suspicion of an incest relationship is dispelled only after confirming the death of the real daughter. The antagonist's parents and wife attempt to kill him for money when he thinks home is the safest place to hide from the bounty hunters. In the Knight of Gamblers series (*God of Gamblers II*, *The Conman*, *The Conmen in Vegas*) the protagonist's girlfriend and wife leave him one after another. In Saint of Gamblers (*God of Gamblers III: Back to Shanghai*) Sing's dream girl literally has the word "dream" in her name and she is unreachable to him. There is either the killing of the protagonist's loved one, or a lack of success in the romance plot. In martial arts genre films usually the chivalric protagonist's role is to protect the family. In Wong Jing's gambler films the protagonist is a champion in his profession, but fails as a protector of his family. It is his profession that brings tragedy to his love ones. Home is where the killings of his family happen. The motif of homelessness has become stronger and been put in the foreground in Wong Jing's gambler films since 1998. In *The Conman*, King is homeless after getting out of prison. His wife disappears with their son. He and his protégé have to crash at the young man's

sister's place. In *The Conmen in Vegas*, there is only a hotel room and a trailer, but no home. And this is not a road movie in which the characters roam free. In *The Tricky Master*, the home is on fire and the protagonists have to run and hide. There is never a place where the character feel's as safe as home. There is also an absence of a protective father figure for other characters. In *Back to Shanghai* Sing's grandfather is a sissy. There is no father figure in the story. The gangster head Ding Lik is not a protective male figure. He is ready to give away his fiancé to Sing when he learns about Sing's interest. Later his fiancé is killed, and there is no scene showing his sadness. In the *Casino Tycoon* series, Mei is the protagonist's love interest. When Mei's father is away from home the stepsister assists a man in raping Mei. The scene spirals into having the sisters attempting to kill each other. In the sequel of *God of Gamblers*, the father Hoi On (Ko Sau Leung) of the Taiwanese family is killed, leaving behind the sister and her young brother to fend for themselves. This sense of homelessness and the splitting up of the family coincides with the ethos of the era. In the pre-1997 period there was a massive out-migration of the middle class, causing the "astronauts" (*taikongren*) phenomenon[113], the splitting up of husbands and wives of migrating families. For the lower class, the unreasonably high price of land forbade any hope of owning a home and created the "shell-less snail" phenomenon, the family without a home. After the outbreak of the financial crisis in 1998 extensive foreclosure left many people homeless. Wong Jing's orphan island fantasia is a wild dream of being a world champion, boasting of our economic miracle in the world while one does not even have a home base.

Wong Jing has his fantastic style to match his fantasia. In *God of Gamblers*, in a myth of the unbeatable hero and an illusion of autonomy and power, Wong Jing lavishes his work with dramatic music, glamorous outfits and hairstyles, preposterous plot lines, and hyperbolic characters with expressive acting styles. The best example is the final

contest scene. The protagonist Ko Chun dresses in a tuxedo with a glam up hairstyle. His entrance is accompanied with dramatic music and played in slow motion. Wong Jing's films always feel light-hearted even when there are horrible things happening to the characters. The tragic dimensions are usually treated lightly and overshadowed by the comic segments. For example, in *God of Gamblers Returns*, after the sad moment of the death of the protagonist's admirer Siu Yiu Yiu (Wu Chien-lien), there is an immediate cut to the casino scene with Siu's brother Siu Fong Fong (Tony Leung Ka Fai) playing the comic relief. In the *God of Gamblers* series the death of the protagonist's loved one is never dealt with at length. The leaving of the girlfriends in *God of Gamblers II* and *The Conmen in Vegas* is only briefly mentioned in dialogues with no scene shown.

In these fantastic stories, the protagonist and antagonist are cardboard characters with no moral ambiguity. Writer Lin Dake notices that Wong Jing's popular movies reflected the traditional moral value *wulun* - the five basic human relationships. For example, the protagonist is extremely virtuous. He will not betray his woman, disrespect his parent, betray his friend, forgetting another's favor, etc. Lin Dake writes, "Wong Jing is completely understanding of what the audience wants. Besides looking for entertainment, they want to forget their lower class status and put themselves on a moral high ground to judge others." ("Wong Jing") Stars in one of Wong Jing's films usually have an emotional flatness in their acting style, as noticed by film critic Li Cheuk-to. Li writes, "Andy Lau gets a lot of praises for his multi-facet image and low key performance in *Running Out of Time* (Johnnie To, 1999).[114] But when he's in the gangster world of Wong Jing's *Century of the Dragon* (1999) he slips back into his old ways. He only acts with his usual formulaic facial expression. However, that might be Wong Jing's request. Wong Jing only needs the actor's image, not his acting skill" (C.-t. Li "Wong Jing" 197-98). It is true that Wong Jing appropriates the star's image, but delivering the comic

effect requires the actor's deadpan acting skill and the director's direction. Li Cheuk-to praises Andy Lau's performance in another Wong Jing's movie *The Conman* (1998). Li writes, "Andy Lau's acting has never been that pleasing in *The Conman*. The key is he tones down his heroic outlook and gives up the myth of invincibility" ("Post-1997" 167-68). What Li Cheuk-to didn't notice is that this can also be the director's request because Wong Jing has turned to a realist style for an anti-hero story for this film. In the *God of Gamblers* series, Ko Chun's hairstyle change indicates his change from the silly guy with a brain injury to the smart gambling champion. But the character doesn't change on the inside. He is the same mythical heroic character. In *The Conman* series, King does not change his salt-and-pepper hair even after he gets out of prison and travels to a colorful place like Las Vegas. Yet the character has changed on the inside. Unlike Ko Chun, after the brain injury, King's life has literally turned colorless and he becomes realistic and steadfast. Andy Lau's acting style corresponds with that.

Wong Jing did not simply mold a star's performance to fit his request for "Wong Jing" cartoonist acting style. He has criteria for selecting his stars. The stars playing his protagonists are Chow Yun Fat, Andy Lau, Stephen Chow, Leon Lai and Nick Cheung. They all came from TV factory training and are family-audience oriented stars. They have three things in common: they are extremely hardworking; top dogs in their fields; and have approachable personas. Chow Yun Fat was known for being hardworking since his TV days. With the drama serials shown five days a week, he was constantly on screen for many years. In the film industry, he is also prolific. In 1987, he played in 11 films. In 1988, he was in 8 films and his total box office of that year is 137 million, ranked fifth in term of total gross, but first in terms of box office per film. He is known for his approachable personality. Today in Hong Kong even with his Hollywood fame he is often captured by paparazzi shopping in a wet market and taking the bus and the subway.

In the 1990s, there was an expression of "Two Chows and one Cheng" for the Chinese New Year films. "Chows" refer to Chow Yun Fat and Stephen Chow. ("Cheng" refers to "Cheng Long", Jackie Chan's stage name.) Stephen Chow originated his unique "mo-lei-tou" comedy (mo-lei-tou roughly means non-sense). In 2001 Shaolin Soccer (Stephen Chow as star, writer, director and producer) was the top box office hit (60 million HKD) of that year. Later his *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004) was a co-production with Hollywood financing and distribution. Andy Lau is one of the most commercially successful film actors in Hong Kong. In 1988, he made 9 films in a year and his total box office was 145 million, ranked third among his fellow overbooked stars (Q. Li). From 1982 to 2007 he has made 100 films while maintaining a successful singing career. He and Leon Lai are two of "the four heavenly kings of Cantopop" of the 1990s. Nick Cheung, a relative newcomer, won six best actor awards for his performance in *Beast Stalker* (Dante Lam, 2008). Wong Jing admired his father deeply. His father Wong Tin Lam was one of the three major directors of the Cathay studio (aka MP & GI) and a prominent producer at TVB. In the 1950s Wong Tin Lam made 8 to 20 movies a year. It is estimated that he was involved in at least 300 to 400 movies throughout his career. And yet he also produced some award-winning and memorable classics like *All in the Family* (1959), *The Wild, Wild Rose* (1960) and *The Greatest Civil War on Earth* series (1961-1964). Despite his status and fame, he was known for being hardworking and approachable. Wong Jing, like an auteur director having his star playing his alter-ego, chooses stars with personas that fit his values and world view. Wong Jing says, "I believe in the significance of a family relationship. You can lose everything and be trapped in a cul-de-sac. What is left is your family. I'm very close to my papa and everyone in the family, my sisters, daughters and my wife. You can lose all your bet. But if you lose your family relationship, it is a total loss. When you still have your family, you haven't met your Waterloo yet. This is how I

look at life" (Shin *Wong Jing* 98-99). *The Conman* is Wong Jing's illustration of a loser. Conman King lets go of his relationship with his wife and child. His life is not glamorous, colorful and heroic like that of Ko Chun.

Hong Kong action cinema is known for its male bonding. John Woo, for instance, depicts male bonding at an unlikely place, between the cop and the killer (also played by Chow Yun Fat) in *The Killer* (1989). In Wong Jing's gambler films, the core relationship is also between two men. But his bonding is between an older man and a younger one: mentor-protégé or uncle-nephew. For example, in *God of Gamblers* the core relationship is between Ko Chun and Little Knife. The story starts with Ko Chun touring around the world with his fiancé, but she is killed in the middle of the film. In the final scene the bonding of the two men is expressed by their sharing of a male-specific vulgar in-joke. They say to each other, "I'll cut off your penis." In the Saint of Gamblers series, the uncle-nephew pair is played by Ng Mang-tat and Stephen Chow. Wong Jing probably appropriates this pair from Corey Yuen and Jeff Lau's successful hit *All for the Winner* (1990). In *God of Gamblers II*, Uncle Three suggests to his nephew Sing that they share a prostitute with the money they gain from gambling, and the two instantly share the same bad karma: both mysteriously drop on the street from the window of their home. In *Back to Shanghai* the plot is moved by Sing rescuing his uncle/grandpa (both played by Ng Mang-tat.) As Wu Yufu points out in gambler films, the plot is often advanced by the protagonist being betrayed by the bad protégé (or younger cousin or younger sworn brother) and then the loyal younger one comes to the older one's rescue. For example, in *God of Gamblers*, Ko Chun is betrayed by his younger cousin, and his loyal protégé Little Knife comes to warn him. In the prequel and sequel, Dragon (played by Jordan Chan and Charles Heung) comes to his rescue. Deeply embedded in these characters is the traditional Confucian value of the older one caring for the younger one, and the

younger one having respect for, and loyalty to, the mentor and senior. Wong Jing's gambler films reveal his anxiety of the fading of this traditional value. One interesting rule of this genre is that the protagonist's protégés cannot use their skill in gambling for selfish monetary reward. The senior cares for the junior and passes down his skill to him. But he also has to guard against his protégé abusing his power. Ko Chun forbids Little Knife to use the money he gains from gambling. Sing only learnt foot massage from his mentor when he visited him in Las Vegas. Surprisingly in 1997, in the prequel the betrayal comes from the senior one of the mentor-protégé pair. Ko Chun's mentor adopts him and trains him to be a master in gambling. But in a major contest when Ko Chun refuses to join his mentor's scam, the mentor shoots him in the head. The mentor turns out to be the one who killed Ko Chun's father. To add salt to the wound, his former fiancé together with his sworn brother betray him. The foster family is the one most untrustworthy. Ko Chun in fact grew up in a fake family connected more by interest of profit than by love and care. Wong Jing goes back to the theme of his 1981 film: it is a world of deception.

Interestingly, in his practice in the business Wong Jing hangs onto the romantic idea of the traditional *yi* (the code of brotherhood or a moral code in general). He stands firm to the traditional values and old practices in the new market of the 1990s. He says, "What I'm practicing now is the apprentice system. It doesn't work? So long as I practice it in a Chinese society, it will work. It's outdated? Then I'll find people who respect and fit in this system to work with me. I respect this system and I believe they do too. Even in the future if they are lured away with higher paycheck, I'll be happy for them. I'm the one who trains them. And I deeply believe that if one day I need them, they definitely will come back to help me. My mentor is Lau Tin Chi. He taught me scriptwriting. If he needs me now, I definitely will go to him instantly" (W. He "Wong Jing" 56).

In the late 1990s Wong Jing's gambler films get darker and more realistic. The realist style of *The Conman* makes it the most "un-Wong Jing" style gambler film directed by Wong Jing. When Hong Kong was hit hard by the regional financial crisis, in *The Conman*, Wong Jing deconstructs the myth he created: the glamorous life of an invincible gambler. Unlike Wong Jing's other righteous heroes, the personality of King is flawed. The opening sequence is him cheating on his wife with a prostitute. After doing his time, King changes and becomes steadfast. There is even a voice over of King stating his plans for the future. The voice over is a self-introspection narrative device rarely seen in Wong Jing's fantasia films. His heroic characters never do self-introspection or plan for the future. They just seize opportunities. *The Conman* is full of self-reflexive moments. King routinely corrects his protégé Skinny Dragon (Nick Cheung)'s illusion of the glamorous life of a gambler. He warns Skinny Dragon, "This is not like in a movie." He still engages in gambling, but the work required is heavy. Skinny Dragon complains that it is like preparing for a public exam. King's wife was not killed but chose to leave him and marry his best friend. King didn't seek revenge on his best friend for stealing his wife whom he had neglected. His brother is killed and his son is crippled. Wong Jing's depiction and King's description of the teamwork and tedious preparation of a conman's job is realistic. It is closer to social scientist's research study of the gambling industry in Hong Kong than the lone champion Wong Jing previously constructed. Chu Yiu Kong in his study of the triad business describes, "As casino gambling is prohibited in Hong Kong, underground casinos are normally small in size because they need to 'float' from place to place to avoid police detection. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the operational costs of a casino are low…the operation of an underground casino requires a large sum of capital, skilled labour, a group of security personnel, and reliable customers" (88-89).

Interestingly, Chu's description of the casino operation looks similar to the operation of the Hong Kong film industry. In the 1970s the Hong Kong government worked on a new direction of cultural policy and established or sponsored five local professional performing art institutions[115] but the film industry was left to operate like an illegitimate business under censorship control and triad harassment. In the late 1990s triad involvement in the film industry subsided as the business deteriorated. Li Cheuk-to observes, *The Conman* is representative of the post-1997 Hong Kong movies. They are characterized with loss, sadness and regret, in contrast to the optimism of pre-1997 entertainment movies. But Wong Jing, as always audience- and market-oriented, does not attribute his style change to personal factors. Instead he links it to changes in Hong Kong society. He says, "We have to pay attention to trends when making comedy. The pre-1997 'non-sense' comedy and farce is a result of an abnormal development. But now Hong Kong economy is bad. A lot of people are jobless and face foreclosure. That will make comedy turn to realist style. Any comedy has to reflect the dark side of society and people to make the jokes work. Comedy and social change are inseparable" (Ernie Au 38). While the audience is still nostalgic of a bygone era and indulges in the myths he has created, Wong Jing is clear-headed enough to change direction.

In the next two gambler films (*The Conmen in Vegas*, *The Tricky Master*, 1999) Wong Jing reconstructs the myth and switches back to the early years' "Wong Jing" style: sex jokes, bathroom jokes, cartoon characters and the glamorous casino setting. The inclusion or exclusion of vulgarity is in his market calculations. In a 2001 interview he says, "The critics criticize the bathroom joke in my films. In fact, I only put bathroom jokes in my films in the first five years of my directing career. In the last 15 years, there is almost no this kind of jokes in my films. I intentionally took out this element" (Ernie Au 37). In an interview back in 1984 in response to the bathroom jokes in his movies,

Wong Jing didn't deny it or justify it. As always, it's about market calculations. Wong Jing says, "I think whether I should retain those jokes depends on my target audience. If I expect a box office above 15 million, then I better not use those jokes. But the box office goal of *I Love Lolanto* is 10 million. There is no need to avoid sex and bathroom jokes. Just treat them in a neater way" (Luo 28). With the markets of Hong Kong cinema having shrunk drastically after 1997, *The Conmen in Vegas* and *The Tricky Master* (1999) are mostly probably a big dream for a shrunken market.

In *My Name is Nobody* (2000) there is another sharp turn. Wong Jing is the writer, producer and star. The bonded males are an uncle and his nephew played by Nick Cheung and Wong Jing, himself. The Uncle Lo character's full name is Luo Sihai (Lo Sei Hoi in Cantonese). "Sihai" literally means four seas and "Sihai weijia" means to make one's home wherever one is. Luo Shihai is a character Wong Jing created in his television days. He brought the gambling genre, the popular character Luo Sihai, and the star playing it (Patrick Tse) with him when he migrated to the film industry. In the ending of *My Name is Nobody*, the girlfriend (Shu Qi) learns that the protagonist No-name (Nick Cheung) let her raped by his opponent in front of him while he pretended to be blind. Like King's wife in *The Conman*, she makes the decision to leave him, and she sarcastically congratulates him for accomplishing his mission of revenge. This is a most uncharacteristically mixed sad ending of Wong Jing's story. But this movie of the winning loser is directed under Aman Chang and the protagonist is not betrayed by one protégé, but two. One causes him to become blind, and rapes his girlfriend. The other one pretends to remain loyal and stand by his side during his time of misfortune, only to plot against him in the final contest. Writer, producer and actor Wong Jing has Uncle Lo killed in the ending of the story and this sounded the death knell of Hong Kong gambler genre. Wong Jing's gambler films witness the most prosperous time of the Hong Kong

economy. At the peak of the popularity of the genre, Wong Jing's protagonist is able to exert control over something as random as gambling. He survives with the help of his loyal protégé and emerges as a champion with intelligence and skill.

WONG JING IS NOT A GAMBLER

Wong Jing likes betting on horse racing, but he says he is more interested in doing the homework, studying the data and analyzing the result. He says, "I am not a gambler. It's just a game I play. It is like doing homework to prepare for an exam…my bottom line is it shouldn't affect my life. I don't like playing mahjong. If I started this hobby, friends would expect me to join them every time" (L. Pan 26-27). He keeps the same distance in his work with others. He describes his way of working since the Shaw studio as a one man show. He says he wrote the script and prepared everything before he handed the project to the line producer. He continues to work like this in the 1990s. He says, "I like working with different people and trying out new things. I didn't build up my power by forming my own clan. I don't like doing it that way. All these years, my co-operation with my friends is a loose association. I worked with Manfred Wong and recently with Gordon Chan. But we don't hang out together all the time. We will get together once in a while. But they do their own things and I do mine" (Cindy S.C. Chan "Wong Jing"). Wong Jing looks at the people at the bottom of society and gives them a dream. In a colonial city like Hong Kong where people can only vote with their feet or march on the street, it's futile to look to the future for hope. Wong Jing gives them hope, albeit false hope, in his movie magic to fuel their days. He survived the early years with his jungle training in the television and film industries. He brought with him his proven genre and characters and devised his own formulas and mechanisms to work efficiently. In the 1990s he thrived in the market by projecting a desirable Hong Kong identity with his unique fantastic story of a gambling world champion, an honorable man working in a

base profession from a marginal place who defies his destiny with intelligence and integrity, albeit without a home base. Wong Jing establishes his reputation as a safe bet for his financial supporters and constructs his brand "Wong Jing" as a guarantee of entertainment to his audience. His dreams are fantastic, but as a maker of these dreams he remains clear-headed in his game. From day one in his film career, he positions himself as an entertainer for the masses and never wavers, despite the challenges from the Hong Kong New Wave and later another wave of the art film generation.

Between the extreme ends of the spectrum are directors who try to balance between art and commerce. Tsui Hark is one of the most successful of these middle-of-the-way filmmakers. He is one of the leaders of the Hong Kong New Wave generation. In 1980 his film *"Dangerous Encounter – 1st Kind"*, was banned by the colonial government for political reasons. But the next year he went to the other extreme. He joined the Cinema City and directed their renowned 9-reels formulaic mass entertainment film *All the Wrong Clues (for the Right Solution)*. His box office performance also shows this zigzag and yo-yo pattern. How did he work efficiently and thrive in the 1990s? How did he even survive the early years?

Table 6.1 Wong Jing Gambler Film Selected Filmography

* As usual of Hong Kong production, the Chinese and English titles do not correspond and create confusion. For example in the English title *God of Gamblers II* in fact is a spinoff of the first one. *God of Gamblers Returns* is the real sequel as reflected in the Chinese title.

Year	**English Title**	**Role**	**Star**	**Release date**	**Box office (HKD)**
1981	*Challenge of the Gamesters*	mahjong cheat, director, writer	Patrick Tse	April 3 99 min	5,081,870
1981	*Mahjong Heroes*	Writer	Patrick Tse	Dec 22 91 min	6,493,694
1982	*Winner Takes All*	"Private Investigator Yeung" director, writer	Patrick Tse	Feb 12 96 min	Not available
1987	*Born to Gamble*	"Skinny Tsing" director, writer	Nat Chan	April 1 100 min	5,304,148
1989	*Casino Raiders*	co-direct with Jimmy Heung, writer	Andy Lau, Alan Tam	June 29 125 min	23,292,339
1989	*God of Gamblers*	"Brothel client" director, writer	Chow Yun Fat Andy Lau	Dec 14 126 min	37,058,686
1990	*God of Gamblers II*	Director, writer	Andy Lau, Stephen Chow, Ng Mang-tat	Dec 13 105 min	40,342,758
1991	*God of Gamblers III: Back to Shanghai*	Director, writer	Stephen Chow, Ng Man-Tat,	Aug 22 120 min	31,163,730
1992	*Casino Tycoon*	Director, writer, producer	Andy Lau	Feb 20 126 min	18,611,389
1992	*Casino Tycoon II*	Director, writer, producer	Andy Lau	Aug 20 112 min	35,236,551
1994	*God of Gamblers Returns*	Director, writer	Chow Yun Fat	Dec 15 124 min	52,529,768
1995	*The Saint of Gamblers*	Director, writer, producer	Eric Kot	June 28 98 min	13,111,400
1997	*God of Gamblers 3: The Early Stage*	Director, writer, producer	Leon Lai	Dec 14 92 min	16,986,954
1998	*The Conman*	"Squirrel", director, writer, producer	Andy Lau, Nick Cheung	Dec 18 95 min	17,369,190
1999	*The Conmen in Vegas*	"Handsome Wu" director, writer, producer	Andy Lau, Nick Cheung, Nat Chan	Jun 25 90 min	17,761,670

Table 6.1 continue

Year	English Title	Role	Star	Release date	Box office (HKD)
1999	*The Tricky Master*	"Ferrari" director, writer, producer	Stephen Chow, Nick Cheung, Wong Jing	Aug 5 95 min	19,141,640
1999	*Century of the Dragon*	Writer, producer, presenter	Andy Lau, Louis Koo	Oct 15 106 min	8,313,482
2000	*My Name is Nobody*	"Uncle Lo", writer, producer	Nick Cheung, Wong Jing	Feb 26 94 min	Not available
2000	*Conman in Tokyo*	Producer, presenter	Nick Cheung, Louis Koo	Aug 31 103 min	7,300,184

Table 6.2 Selected bibliography of Hong Kong Gambler Film in 1989-2003

God of Gamblers series:

Year	English title	Director	Star	Release date	Box office (HKD)
1989	*God of Gambler*	Wong Jing	Chow Yun Fat Andy Lau	Dec 14 126 min	37,058,686
1994	*God of Gambler Returns*	Wong Jing	Chow Yun Fat	Dec 15 124 min	52,529,768
1997	*God of Gamblers 3: The Early Stage*	Wong Jing	Leon Lai	Dec 14 92 min	16,986,954

Saint of Gamblers series:

Year	English title	Director	Star	Release date	Box office (HKD)
1990	*All for the Winner*	Corey Yuen Jeff Lau	Stephen Chow Ng Mang-tat	Aug 18 99-102 min	41,326,156
1995	*The Saint of Gamblers*	Wong Jing	Eric Kot	June 28 98 min	13,111,400
2000	*My Name is Nobody*	Aman Chang	Nick Cheung Wong Jing	Feb 26 94 min	Not available

Knight of Gambler series:

Year	English title	Director	Star	Release date	Box office (HKD)
1990	*God of Gamblers II*	Wong Jing	Andy Lau, Stephen Chow	Dec 13 105 min	40,342,758
1991	*God of Gamblers III: Back to Shanghai*	Wong Jing	Stephen Chow	Aug 22 120 min	31,163,730
1999	*The Conman*	Wong Jing	Andy Lau Nick Cheung	Dec 18 95 min	17,369,190

Table 6.2 cont.

Knigth of Gabmler series

Year	English title	Director	Star	Release date	Box office (HKD)
1999	*The Conmen in Vegas*	Wong Jing	Andy Lau Nick Cheung Nat Chan	Jun 25 90 min	17,761,670
2000	*Conman in Tokyo*	Ching Siu-Tung	Nick Cheung Louis Koo	Aug 31 103 min	7,300,184
2002	*The Conman 2002*	Aman Chang	Nick Cheung	Nov 7 98 min	1,466,320
2003	*Fate Fighter*	Steve Cheng	Nick Cheung	Jun 4 88 min	1,833,467

Casino Raider/Tycoon series

Year	English title	Director	Star	Release date	Box office (HKD)
1989	*Casino Raiders*	Wong Jing co-direct with Jimmy Heung	Andy Lau Alan Tam	June 29 125 min	23,292,339
1991	*Casino Raiders II*	Johnny To	Andy Lau	Jun 13 91 min	16,889,659
1992	*Casino Tycoon*	Wong Jing	Andy Lau	Feb 20 126 min	18,611,389
1992	*Casino Tycoon II*	Wong Jing	Andy Lau	Aug 20 112 min	35,236,551

Others

Year	English title	Director	Star	Release date	Box office (HKD)
1991	*The Top Bet* (aka *Queen of Gamblers*)	Jeff Lau, Corey Yuen	Carol Cheng, Anita Mui	Mar 7 99 min	15,575,932
1999	*The Tricky Master*	Wong Jing	Stephen Chow, Nick Cheung, Wong Jing	Aug 5 95 min	19,141,640

Chapter 7 Tsui Hark The Disciplined Rebel

Tsui Hark is the second-highest top box office director in the domestic market in the 1990s.[116] From 1990 to 1996 he directed 16 films and his total gross was 268 million HKD (C. W. Chan "Rank"; Cindy S.C. Chan "Colonial Modernity"). He is one of the leading members of the Hong Kong New Wave generation, known for their personal and socially-relevant films. He survived the extremely commercial system in the 1980s that had crushed the careers of many of his fellow New Wave filmmakers. He continued to be prolific in the 1990s, sojourned in Hollywood in the late 1990s, and is still productive now. In 1979 he made his directorial début *The Butterfly Murders*, a peculiar futuristic detective-story martial arts film, with independent production company Seasonal Film. In 1980 his nihilistic anti-social film *Dangerous Encounter – 1st Kind* was banned by the colonial government censor. The next year he swung to the other extreme and made *All the Wrong Clues (for the Right Solution)* (1981) for Cinema City, a rising film company of the 1980s tripartite, known for their formulaic 9-reelers' mass entertainment. In 1983 when the media buzz about the New Wave filmmakers subsided, he directed *Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain*, a big budget Chinese New Year film for Golden Harvest, the rival of the Shaw studio in the 1970s and one of the tripartite of the 1980s. In 1984, he set up a production house Film Workshop with his wife Nansun Shi.[117] As a producer, he produced critically and commercially successful films such as John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) and *The Killer* (1989) and Ching Siu-tung's *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987). Tsui Hark's mom-and-pop shop-like production house, and artisanal mode of production was typical of Hong Kong filmmaking in the 1990s. But Film Workshop has operated for 25 years, an impressive feat in view of the musical chair pattern of Hong Kong production houses.

In the 1990s, *Once Upon A Time in China* (1991), a film Tsui Hark was heavily involved in as producer, director and scriptwriter, was critically and commercially successful and spawned off an entire decade of sequels and copycats. Tsui Hark himself produced four sequels and three spinoffs in the space of seven years amidst the two dozen films he produced in the same time period with critical or commercial success, such as *Swordsman II* (1992), *Dragon Inn* (1992), *The Lovers* (1994), *The Chinese Feast* (1995), *The Blade* (1995) etc. (see table 7.1) What is so intriguing about Tsui Hark is not only his zigzag career moves and yo-yo pattern box office performance, but also his "childish" and "artistic" personality. In an interview by veteran entertainment news writer Lam Ping in 1989, Tsui Hark admitted he failed as a producer since he was bad at handling interpersonal relationships and financial management. He said, "When I worked as a producer I ran over budget. The directors working under me were unhappy. The films didn't make much money. I feel like imbecile" (P. L. M. N. Lam 159). It is known that Tsui Hark as a producer had miscommunications and a falling out with directors like King Hu, John Woo, Yim Ho, Sammo Hung, Alex Cheung, etc. His peer Ann Hui didn't want to work with him because he was too involved in the creative process.[118] Tsui Hark explained, "I am also a director. I don't like the others 'interfere' in my project. Of course I understand they don't like me to 'interfere' in their projects either. But I have no choice. They used up the money and the boss stopped the funding. I have to fix the problem" (P. L. M. N. Lam 159). In my interview with him in 2000, when I asked him if he was bothered by his own difficult personality, and he was not even apologetic about that. He didn't deny or confirm the falling out, but assertively said: "People should judge it from the end products, the films" (Cindy S.C. Chan "Tsui Hark"). Like the chivalric knight in a martial arts novel, Tsui Hark does not seem to have a concept of money. He admitted that there was a period of time when his wife drove him to work everyday that it didn't occur

to him that he had to bring cash with him (P. L. M. N. Lam). He said he handed all of his money to his wife because he did not like managing finances. Lam Ping described that he didn't have cash, and that he only went to restaurants designated by his wife. Tsui Hark's avoidance of handling money extended to his work place. He admitted that at Cinema City the bosses always asked him to work on editing and re-shooting of others' films without paying him. His response was to avoid their phonecalls instead of asking them for payment. When asked if that's because he's a romantic and didn't care much about money, Tsui Hark responded, "No, I care about money. It's just that I don't know how to talk about money with them" (P. L. M. N. Lam 160). He maintained this naive attitude about money and administration even after setting up his own production company and working as a producer. In Lam Ping's 1989 interview, when asked who helped him with executive work, he sounded like an indulgent child: "The executive general manager is Terrance Chang. This is excellent. Now I can act like a kid. I don't need to manage anything. I can completely depend on him" (P. L. M. N. Lam 172). But Terrance Chang soon went to Hollywood with John Woo. Lam Ping described Tsui Hark as a perfectionist artist who was not careful enough about money. She said to Tsui Hark, "Chor Yuen (a prominent director) says you will spend over 1 million dollars just to get a tiny little bit better, say 5 points or 10 points" (P. L. M. N. Lam 173). Tsui Hark's obliviousness to money issues is written into the script of the *Once Upon A Time in China* series, in which the protégés of the protagonist, like Tsui Hark's wife in real life, have to follow their master around to pay for merchandise and services he forgets to pay for. *Once Upon A Time in China* is a remake of a popular long-running Cantonese kung fu film *Wong Fei Hung* (Wu Pang, 1949 – 1960s). Tsui Hark reset the background to the late Qing period when the country was under Western imperialist invasion and on the verge of disintegration. Historical figures are inserted to tell an imagined modern Chinese

history. With the story revolving around the Southern regional folk hero Wong Fei Hung and his entourage, *Once Upon A Time in China* is more about Hong Kong at the present than China in the past. Wong Fei Hung's home town Fu Shan (in Canton), an affluent East-meets-West port city in Southern China, is a stand-in for Hong Kong.

Before Hong Kong's return to China, some have attributed Hong Kong's fairytale-like rise to a world-class city to it being more open to Western influence, especially when compared to China, which had closed its door for a few decades. In the 1990s, Western media often depicted Hong Kong as a symbol of the triumph of capitalism about to be devoured by Red China. In China, late leader Deng Xiaoping spoke upon various occasions of the plan to replicate Hong Kong in Special Economic Zones in China, implicitly endorsing Hong Kong as a proven case of modernity with a Chinese flavor, in China's practice of "socialism with Chinese characteristics". With the assumption of a unified standard of modernization, Hong Kong seemed to gain advantages and endorsements from both sides. But Rey Chow points out the double impossibility of Hong Kong's coloniality, the predicament of self-writing and the conflation of the postcolonial with the postmodern (see chapter 2). She writes, "The enormous seductiveness of the post-modern hybridite's discourse lies, of course, in its invitation to join the power of global capitalism by flattening out past injustices…the postmodern hybridite's emphasis falls on *post* in the strict sense of 'after' and 'over with,' and since all posts are considered the same, postcolonial is easily construed as synonymous with postmodern. In a space like Hong Kong, the postmodern hybridite would criticize not British colonialism (read: 'international openness') but Chinese nationalism (read: 'native conservatism'), thus obliterating or blurring the complex history of the rise of modern Chinese nationalism as an overdetermined response to western imperialism of the past few centuries" (157).

Tsui Hark's *Once Upon A Time in China* series seems to fit into Rey Chow's description of a postmodern hybridite: flattening out past injustice and criticizing only native conservatism. The series depicts Fu Shan as an East-meets-West port city where Chinese tradition integrates with Western modernity perfectly. Even though the story is set with an East-West conflict as background, the Westerners are mostly cardboard characters and only take up brief screen time. The ultimate antagonists who take up more narrative space are actually Chinese, such as a xenophobic religious sect, the corrupted Qing court officials, and a stubborn desperate martial artist from the North etc. In the scene of the burning down of Po Chi Lam (the home and medicine shop of Wong Fei Hung and his entourage) the written character "unequal treaty" on a paper fan is partially burnt and changed to "equal treaty", it seems to imply the erasing of past inequality. While Wong Fei Hung is befuddled by the changes brought by Western challenges, his love interest is a Westernized Chinese woman returning from an overseas education bringing advanced knowledge and technology to this port city. In the ending scene, Wong Fei Hung changes to a Western suit and takes pictures with a camera. Throughout the series there are more depictions of Chinese people's ignorance, complacency and conservativeness than examples of the atrocities of Western imperialism. But the series is popular in both China and the West. In this film series of an imagined history of China, is the past reconstructed and interpreted anew for the benefit of a global culture and in the interest of a market economy? What is the Hong Kong story Tsui Hark tells with the *Once Upon a Time in China* series? With his weakness in interpersonal relationships and financial management in a tightly knit filmmaking community dependent on the traditional mode of financing, how did Tsui Hark stand out in the competitive environment of the 1990s? How did he even survive the harsh conditions that squashed the careers of his fellow New Wave filmmakers in his early years? With his wavering

positions between personal films and commercial entertainment, what is Tsui Hark's consistent appeal and strength to stay in the market?

Tsui Hark is the most prolific and commercially successful director among his New Wave peers. He is a disciplined rebel like the feisty Monkey King in the Chinese classic Journey to the West who can transform his appearance into 72 forms but cannot escape his mentor's control and the confines of the Buddha's Palm.[119] However much he tries to push the limit, he never repudiates the commercial system or operates outside of government censorship. Despite his frantic filmmaking style, he sees the significance of discipline in the Hong Kong film industry. He said, "They (his scriptwriters-protégés) told me they are distracted by the problems in their lives. I told them there are always problems in people's lives. To grow up they must learn how to discipline themselves. They said they couldn't. Creative work requires discipline. Without discipline, how can you work with others…. If you can convince me, I will follow your way. If not, we have to follow someone else. We can't work together for a creative work but insist on each doing things in his own way" (D. Wei 62). Tsui Hark knew when and which way he should follow. As Sam Ho describes in his anthology, Tsui Hark, changing the Hong Kong film industry from the inside and having been mostly free to do what he wanted, is savvy as an industry man who has outlasted both Golden Harvest and Cinema City. He reasons that the key for Tsui Hark to do so, was by allying with industry powers and yet maintaining an independent production house. He wrote, "Tsui Hark has been forging ties with big companies but seldom becoming a part of them. In addition to Cinema City and Golden Harvest, he has also hooked up with Golden Princess, Win's Entertainment, China Star, Cathay Organization, Columbia Asia and One Hundred Years of Film. At one point or another, he would have arguments with some of these companies, but he never severed ties with them, as in the case of Golden Harvest and Cinema City. Pitching tents

but never pouring foundations, Tsui remained an independent, keeping himself and his company viable while always striking deals with industry powers" (Ho "Introduction Swordsman" xi). Throughout his career, Tsui Hark's productions are mostly supported by big companies and the high grossing *Once Upon A Time in China* series was supported by Golden Harvest (except the last one in 1997) (see table 7.1)

Like Wong Jing, he fitted well in the Hong Kong film industry's financier-exhibition sector-led production approach despite his eccentric outlook and clashes with people. But unlike Wong Jing, the discourse sector was important to his game. The local film critics who coined the term Hong Kong New Wave, played a role in consolidating his image as an unconventional director and boosting his career. His role as an innovator and trend-setter of the industry constantly provided rich material for film critics and the media. Audiences always expected something edgy in his next film. In those days when there was still a clear distinction between the "red trousers" (those trained from the traditional apprenticeship system) and film-school trained directors, Tsui Hark was careful in striking the balance. He said he was surprised that the partners of Cinema City (Raymond Wong, Karl Maka and Dean Shek) would accept a film-school trained director like him. Tsui Hark, on the one hand, emphasized how hard he worked just like filmmakers coming from the traditional apprenticeship system, but on the other hand flaunted his film school education background like his Western film school trained New Wave peers as bringing passion to his art. For example, in Lam Ping's interview, when asked about his long hours of working, he said, "I had worked for 24 hours without sleep. I had also worked for a few days without sleep...There was also one time I fell asleep, the cameraman fell asleep, camera assistant fell asleep, assistant director fell asleep, all fell asleep…It was the actor who called 'cut' to stop the camera rolling" (P. L. M. N. Lam 171-72). In the mid-1990s even after he was well established, Tsui Hark still maintained

his image as a workaholic (H. Huang "Tsui Hark Workaholic"). When discussing the success of creating the Mark character (played by Chow Yun Fat) in *A Better Tomorrow* (John Woo 1986), he said, "I think in making a movie you must keep the feeling of excitement, I have been capturing the kind of excitement I had when studying film in the U.S. …You cannot be insensitive. You must feel excited" (P. L. M. N. Lam 169). Tsui Hark was praised by critics as one of the new generation of filmmakers with a personal style and socio-political perspective, but he always emphasized his attention to audience and market. His message-loaded political allusion films stood out in the 1980s' mass entertainment. By the 1990s, his brand "Tsui Hark" was so established that his filmmaking style, the martial arts genre, the stars' performance and narrative style all bore his trademark. Even though the 1990s was characterized by sequels and copycats, and other directors also began to include political references in their works, it was Tsui Hark's unique voice and vision that made "a Tsui Hark Film" and the *Once Upon a Time in China* series stood out in the market. Tsui Hark is best at remake, and his productions in the 1990s are mostly adaptation, remake and sequels, series and spinoffs (see table 7.1). This was not only an efficient way to help him capitalize on a hit, and proven popular novels and films, but also matched his obsession with exploring new perspectives on old events. As a member of the local-oriented identity-searching Hong Kong New Wave generation, Tsui Hark has been dealing with issues of cultural identity and nationalism. The *Once Upon a Time in China* series epitomizes his effort to rewrite the local history from the margins' perspectives, to redefine the future by rewriting the past. The martial arts genre is the best vehicle for him to project an idealized alternative realm and construct an idealized "new woman" in the historical period when the country was struggling for self-strengthening and modernization. In the 1990s when the Western media flattened Hong Kong's history to its economic present, and China reduced Hong

Kong to its political past, Tsui Hark's anachronistic Chinese history merges the economic affluence of the present with the political instability of the past and projected an idealized historical juncture where a new future for Hong Kong could be re-envisioned. Tsui Hark's remaking of the old Cantonese series *Wong Fei Hung* was not simply for a global culture or a market economy. Tsui Hark, on the one hand, like in the old Cantonese series, foregrounds the Southern Chinese culture to contrast with the Northern Chinese culture, which often is regarded as the most orthodox Chinese culture. On the other hand he inserts Western characters and has his protagonists venture out from the confines of Canton province. Instead of depicting the port city as a Westernized colonial backwater, the series revolves around the protagonist's reflection on learning from the West to rejuvenate the country. By exercising this repetition and re-creation, Tsui Hark looks backward in history and re-imagines the protagonist's hometown as a hybrid wonderland, a place mixing old and new, modern and traditional, East and West. The series indicates a historical endeavor, an effort of the margin to redefine the present by retelling old tales. When the local invents their own imaginative histories of the city and retells an old tale, the retelling itself is a polemical act.

"TSUI HARK" AS A REGENERATOR

The early years of his career has enabled Tsui Hark to thrive in the 1990s. Tsui Hark was born in 1951 in Vietnam with the name of Tsui Man-kwong. He moved to Hong Kong in 1966. In 1969 he studied, traveled and worked in the U.S. In 1975 in New York, he edited a Chinatown newspaper, organized The New Art Drama Group and participated in a Chinatown Community TV. It was there that he started to use his pseudonym "Tsui Hark" (Liu and Li "Study"). According to him "Hark" means overcoming difficulties, indicating his determination to survive and prevail. He returned to Hong Kong in 1977 and worked at TVB, the major TV station. When CTV

(Commercial Television) was established to challenge TVB's dominant market position, the head of the creative team Selina Chow[120] brought Tsui Hark over. Since his days in New York and Hong Kong television industry, Tsui Hark was perceived by those hiring him as innovative: a regenerator bringing new life to an old institution. At CTV in 1978 he received notice for a martial art series called *Golden Dagger Romance*. But CTV soon folded[121] and Tsui Hark moved to the film industry. His first three films are characterized by his trademark eccentric style, and he was nicknamed "Tsui the freak" in the early years of his career (P. L. M. N. Lam). He and his peers were dubbed the Hong Kong New Wave generation. But by 1981 the New Wave subsided and Tsui Hark moved to Cinema City. As Tsui Hark describes in various occasions, he grew up in an unstable environment, so it is not a surprise that he soon adapted himself to an organization with a diametrically different production orientation, and that he managed to rise above its constraints. According to Raymond Wong, the creative energy of Cinema City's core of its key personnel began to wane.[122] When Tsui Hark joined Cinema City, he changed the ways the company operated, but Cinema City also changed him. The eccentric Tsui Hark added new ideas and a creative stimulus to Cinema City's production culture. Cinema City's commercial orientation made Tsui Hark's films more accessible to the general public. Raymond Wong describes how he and his partners hesitated when John Woo suggested Tsui Hark to them, "When we heard the name Tsui Hark, we all freaked out. Tsui Hark made three films: *The Butterfly Murders*, *We're Going to Eat You* and *Dangerous Encounter-1st Kind*. They are all critical success but box office failures. Besides, rumor has it that Tsui Hark ran over budget, got out of control, and his topic is too radical for mass audience. But John Woo guarantees us that Tsui Hark will make a film with both critical and commercial successs." Tsui Hark delivered: a Tsui Hark style film but with a great box office return. Raymond Wong describes, "Tsui Hark's first film

at Cinema City *All the Wrong Clues (for the Right Solution)* still carried his eccentric style. It was set in 1930s' Hong Kong but had a Westernized look. It was also the first time we used art director William Chang. The setting and costumes were so impressive that they set the film apart from the tattered costumes of the kung fu flicks of that era. The audience found it refreshing" (R. Wong "We Freak Out" 13-14). *All the Wrong Clues*'s box office surpassed those of Golden Harvest and the Shaw studio in the summer of 1981.

Despite his zigzag career moves, Tsui Hark consistently projected his image as a regenerator to his financial supporters. At the reception end he provided a guarantee of novelty to his audiences. In an 1981 interview, in response to the reporters' comment that they couldn't make a connection between his third and fourth films (*Dangerous Encounter – 1st Kind* 1980 and *All the Wrong Clues (for the Right Solution)* 1981), Tsui Hark said, "You don't have to predict what I'm going to do because you'll fail to predict what my next film is…I like trying out new things" (Liu and Li "Tsui Hark" 26). Ten years later after many commercial successes, when asked how he viewed his early dark films like *The Butterfly Murders* and *We're Going to Eat You*, Tsui Hark responded, "I feel like they are not made by me. In fact, up till now I still feel like I haven't accomplished anything yet. May be few years later I look back at the films I'm making now I will have the same feeling. This may be because of my constant personality split…The work that I made in those years lacks a lot of things. Even when I look at what I'm doing now, I still feel inadequate. As I always say, we need to keep up with time and deepen our knowledge in film in terms of technique and thought" (Law and Lo 28). Novelty and improvement are the audience's expectation of Tsui Hark's new films.

Very early on Tsui Hark had set his goal to be an innovator, one who balanced between personal expression and survival in a commercial system. Despite the critics'

descriptions of his idiosyncrasies, Tsui Hark was audience-conscious and market-oriented from day one. He was not dizzy from the media buzz and celebratory atmosphere around the new directors. In a 1979 interview before the release of his first film he said, "Whatever films I make, I have two principles. The first principle is I want the audience to feel engaged and have fun. This is a very commercial product. I think every new director should be concerned about this. The mythical era of making personal films is gone. We will compromise. That means we will make commercial films but they are commercial films we find satisfaction in making. The second principle is the films we make will be acceptable for the film connoisseur. We won't do shoddy production" (Shu 35). In an interview a few months later, he reasserted the importance of commercial considerations to New Wave directors, "While I'm having fun making the movie, I also have to consider the film's commercial value. This is a matter of survival. We need a group of new directors who can survive in the industry and make new movies. We present new topics. This is commercial value. We use new technique. This is gimmick. To innovate is a commercial act" (Gao and Deng 33). Tsui Hark's trademark genre is martial arts, the perennial genre of Hong Kong cinema. Tsui Hark always brought excitement to critics and the audience by reinventing the genre.

MARTIAL ARTS GENRE AS RE-PRESENTATION OF HONG KONG CHINESENESS

Sam Ho describes Tsui Hark as "a filmmaker with an obvious fixation on things Chinese" (Ho "Introduction Swordsman" ix). The martial arts genre is the best vehicle for Tsui Hark to deal with issue of Chineseness and modernity, a recurrent concern in his oeuvre. His perspective has gradually shifted from emptying out Chineseness in order to realize modernity, to affirmation of the peculiarity of Hong Kong Chineseness. Chen Pingyuan, in his study of martial arts novels writes that the cultural value of the martial arts novel is its creation of a special world -*jianghu*. (literally means rivers and lakes. It

refers to the martial arts world). His analysis of *jianghu* as an idealized alternative realm also applies to the film version of the genre. Chen Pingyuan writes *jianghu* suggests an alternative realm in relation to the imperial court. The court has its law and *jianghu* has its rules. In reality the law of the court is supreme but in the martial arts novel the heroes are above the law. Chen Pingyuan writes *jianghu* in fact is a reconstruction of the old Chinese dream of a utopia where one escapes from the imperial court, and injustice under the rule of imperial law can be corrected. This is particularly attractive to Chinese people who have long been under the repression of feudal ethics. The knight's putting his fate in his own hands is a representation of Chinese people's longing for freedom. More interestingly Chen Pingyuan also points out that the martial arts novel can provide us with a new perspective on women's status in ancient Chinese society. In the Chinese martial arts novel, the stories of female knight characters are no less fantastic than those of males. Chen Pingyuan concludes that the martial arts novel basically is a "dream writing literature". Chen Pingyuan's study is useful for reading Tsui Hark's *Once Upon a Time in China* series, a martial arts genre film set at the turn of the century, where the hero faces both the law of the Qing imperial court and the challenge of Western civilization. The hero's love interest is an idealized Chinese "new woman" who straddles the divide between the old and new, tradition and modernity, East and West. Despite the country being on the verge of disintegration, the hero's hometown is an idealized alternative realm, an affluent hybrid wonderland of "stability and prosperity".

Working within the censorship rules in the 1980s Tsui Hark's films have been known for their political metaphors. The political message of his films kept critics engaged in his stories and his career moves. In his early years Tsui Hark was conscious of the need to make his political undertone explicit enough for his audience. In the interview a few months before the release of his first film *The Butterfly Murder* (1979) he

steered the reporter to the political dimension of his martial arts film. He said, "My character is a straightforward person and has no secret scheme. He has a political status. That is, under certain circumstances he has no option. It is just like the governments of the world now. They are forced to make certain decisions in a given circumstance. The audience should be able to get this political undertone of my film clearly. This political dimension is absent in Gu Long's martial arts novel. Gu Long's character has a lot of options to make changes in life" (Shu 35). In an interview in 1981 after the commercial success of *All the Wrong Clues*, in response to the reporters' mentioning the search for a central thesis in an auteur director's works, Tsui Hark corrected them, "I feel that we don't start with a central thesis when we make films. Our films are not coherent. It is because we basically are people with an ambivalent value system. This is very characteristic of Hong Kong people" (Liu and Li "Tsui Hark" 26). In that 1981 interview Tsui Hark was conscious of the lack of a coherent image of Hong Kong culture and Hong Kong cinema. He said, "We say Japanese film has Japanese flavor, but what is Hong Kong flavor in Hong Kong films? There is no absolute answer" (Liu and Li "Tsui Hark" 27). In the initial stage of his exploration of Hong Kong flavor, Tsui Hark attempted by breaking away from Chineseness. In response to the question of the strange mix of Japanese and ancient Rome costume design for his characters in *The Butterfly Murders,* Tsui Hark says, "I want to create an era that completely breaks away from the Chinese martial arts world…the so called Chinese martial arts world is the image we usually see in Gu Long and Louis Cha's martial arts novel and the conventional *wuxia* figures…To lead the audience to a new martial arts world, I have to change the characters' outlook. Another method is to add "futuristic" flavor to give it a 'modern' feel" (Gao and Deng 33). Shu Kei said *The Butterfly Murders* which was hard to fit in existing categories was "forging a new path for mechanical *wuxia* film." In that era, Tsui Hark stood out as a

daring director willing to repudiate convention. In 1979 when the industry still had a major studio like Shaw and a big company like Golden Harvest dominating the market, Tsui Hark saw why some filmmakers hesitated to innovate, "Creative work takes a lot of courage. It's because our fellow filmmakers are watching. If your work is not accepted, you will be ridiculed. That's why some filmmakers would rather take the beaten path" (Gao and Deng 34). His conception of *The Butterfly Murder* is a futuristic wuxia sans Chineseness. In *All the Wrong Clues (for the Right Solution)* Tsui Hark said he also intentionally "took out the Chinese elements" in the film. He explains, "When we make a movie, we always want to make it representative of Chinese culture. So we use Chinese calligraphy and Chinese tableware as props. But these things are superficial. How many things in Hong Kong can represent Chinese culture? They are like the oil paintings in flea market, merchandizes for tourists. … I want to see if I take away all those things, will we feel something lacking in the film? Do we need them to constitute the soul of the film? Will it still be a good film without those elements?" (Liu and Li "Tsui Hark" 24). Tsui Hark's repudiation of Chineseness in his conception of modern Hong Kong cinema is indicative of the ethos of the era. In the early 1970s, there was an effort by the colonial government and private cultural forces that contributed to the formation of a more outward-looking and international-oriented local cultural identity. China and Chinese culture were associated with economic backwardness and political fanaticism. Hong Kong in the 1980s was characterized by rapid economic growth and a buildup of political anxiety induced by conflicts in Sino-British talks.

Hong Kong in the 1990s, in the wake of the traumatic event in 1989, and sovereignty change in 1997 as well as China quickening its pace of economic reforms, was even more peculiar when political anxiety was commensurate with economic prosperity. Tsui Hark has a different view about Hong Kong Chineseness, "I feel that

Hong Kong cinema is quite awkward. China is big and its boldness of vision gives you the impulse to do something grand. Hong Kong is awkward. It is like a city of gamblers. People are oriented towards speculation and gimmicks…Hong Kong people are torn between accepting and denying Hong Kong. I'm very engaged. Once I decided to stay in Hong Kong, I don't want to be a marginal person. When I identify myself with this place, I will do something about it. But most people carry with them a marginal mentality. They don't have their own view and don't think their opinions can contribute any help…They don't want to listen to the problem and face the issue" (Law and Lo 28). In 1991 while his audience may still have feelings of powerlessness and be fixated in their marginal mentality, Tsui Hark has changed his perspective. He said, "Using the '1997 deadline' mentality to write scripts will not work. I think it's more important to overcome Hong Kong people's marginal mentality. Now I seldom talk about politics in my films, but the screenwriters say I have to put some back in otherwise it won't look like a Tsui Hark film" (Law and Lo 28). As we shall see, the *Once Upon a Time in China* series is less about China than about applauding Southern Chinese culture and celebrating the regional folk hero. Tsui Hark, in creating the dream of an idealized realm, was performing something much like a filmic affirmation therapy for the Hong Kong mass audience.

The historical stories of Hong Kong's past were not serving Hong Kong for its future. Creative history writing didn't change the past events, but Tsui Hark changed the meaning and interpretation of them. He showed us the power to change the way we think about Hong Kong's past, so that the present can no longer be defined by the past. The *Once Upon a Time in China* series epitomizes Tsui Hark's obsession to rewrite the past, to reread history. This can be easily seen in his second movie *We're Going to Eat You* (1980). Tsui Hark started the story with a detective tracking down a former convict who committed a robbery and then hid inside a cannibal village. The former convict is the

only one not carried away by the craziness in the village, and rescued the detective from being eaten. When asked if he implied that in our society a person has no chance to restart a new life once he has made a mistake, Tsui Hark said, "Yes. We have this obdurate concept in our society: the past defines the present. Even though the ex-convict has repented and became a better person, the detective won't let him go. The detective only focuses on arresting him and ignores the injustice happening in the village" (Hou 23). *A Better Tomorrow* (John Woo, 1986, produced by Tsui Hark), a remake of *Upright Repenter* (Patrick Lung 1967), is about an ex-convict who repents and tries to reconnect with his police officer brother. *A Chinese Ghost Story* (Ching Siu-tung, 1987, produced by Tsui Hark), an adaptation from the Chinese classic Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio, is about a female ghost who changes and tries to save her human lover. Green Snake (1993) is an adaptation from Lillian Lee's popular novel Green Snake which itself is a rewrite of the folklore The Legend of the White Snake. Again, Tsui Hark tells the story of failed redemption of the penitent. The snake sisters have transformed into humans and live as decent human women. But the Buddhist monk won't let them go, and killed the White Snake. *A Better Tomorrow III* (1989) is a prequel to John *Woo's A Better Tomorrow* (1986) set in Saigon in 1974. It's a writing of the history of the character Mark (played by Chow Yun Fat).[123] As Keeto Lam comments Tsui Hark's depiction of Vietnam is full of passion and empathy, very different from mainstream Hong Kong movies' portrayal of a cold and violent country(Cindy S.C. Chan "Chat with Keeto Lam"). Such sensitivity for Vietnam can also be seen in the opening sequence of *Once Upon a Time in China*. A Qing court official laments to the protagonist Wong Fei Hung that while Hong Kong and Macau were ceded to Western nations, and the country is divided, he is sent to Vietnam to fight the French. He looks at the plague on his ship and says to Wong Fei Hung, "How'll the Vietnamese react to this plague that says 'Our Land

Our People.'" In the Cantonese dialogue the characters call Vietnam "Annam". Annam used to be part of the Chinese Empire and now part of Vietnam. It was once a French protectorate. Annam, literally meaning "Pacified South", is like Hong Kong, a dependent territory that could not block out external intervention in its internal authority. The opening sequence of *Once Upon a Time in China* makes a strong statement. The series is not about reasserting the Chinese Empire's dominant position in Annam from the French, or identifying with China's resistance against Western imperialists. It's about the voice of the margin, the cultural identity of the local. It is an affirmation of Hong Kong islander Chineseness and an effort to reorient the perspective on local history in order to restart a new chapter for the future.

REVAMP THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The cultural environment of the late 1970s provided a favorable precondition for the rise of the Hong Kong New Wave filmmakers. There was the rise of what Raymond William calls "cultural formation," a loose association of writers and critics who had similar goals, and who developed a body of polemical writing to justify their opinions. In Hong Kong in the late 1970s, the critics celebrated a younger generation of filmmakers who re-oriented the China-centric perspective of the older generation of Shanghai émigré directors. They coined the term Hong Kong New Wave to refer to the generation who was born after the wars, most of whom got their film education in the West, whose film techniques were more modern and whose films were more locally-oriented and socially relevant. The 1970s was a time of re-orientation.

In the 1970s the Hong Kong government worked on a new direction of cultural policy and established or sponsored five local professional performing arts institutions. These are the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre, the Hong Kong Ballet Company, the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra and the Hong Kong

Dance Company. These are high art organizations and mostly Western-oriented. The Hong Kong Repertory Theatre, for instance, hired Artistic Directors with overseas educations only (mostly U.S.) and performed mostly translated adaptations from Western dramas (Tao "Birth"). The local film industry continued to be neglected by the government. But as Hong Kong's society grew more affluent, there was an establishment of film-related organizations bringing in a new and dynamic atmosphere. The film section of Chinese Student Weekly (1952-1974) introduced foreign films and Western film theories, and nurtured a generation of film critics like Law Kar, Shek Kei and Luk Lay (Ada Loke). Young John Woo also got his articles published there. There were also film clubs showing foreign movies, screening members' short films, organizing seminars and offering film production courses. Studio One, the Film Society of Hong Kong was established in 1962, Da Film Club in 1968, Wei Film Club in 1971, Phoenix Cineclub in 1974, etc.[124] In the early 1980s there was the Hong Kong Film Culture Centre where Fruit Chan worked and learned from Hong Kong New Wave filmmakers like Yim Ho and Ann Hui about film production and scriptwriting before entering the film industry (Cindy S.C. Chan "Fruit Chan"). The Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF) was established in 1977 showing movies from around the world, and the retrospective section screened Hong Kong classic movies. Tony Rayns, a British writer, film festival programmer and screenwriter, worked as the English editor for the first HKIFF and joined the staff for three years (1979-1981) ("20 Years"). Back then Jimmy Ngai noted that Tony Rayns made an effort to recommended King Hu's *Raining in the Mountain* (1979) and *Legend of the Mountain* (1979) in the 1980 London Film Festival ("Names"). In the 1990s Tony Rayns helped promote Wong Kar Wai's name in London. He wrote a book and published articles in the British Film Institute's magazine Sight & Sound. Roger Garcia who worked as advisor, consultant, programmer and editor for HKIFF points out

the role of HKIFF in showcasing the new Chinese cinema. He says it was HKIFF programmer Leong Mo-ling who discovered *Yellow Earth* (Chen Kaige, 1985) and brought Chen Kaige to Hong Kong and showed the world premiere of his film. He writes, after that premiere many foreign programmers such as Paul Clark from Hawaii made a point of attending the HKIFF to secure their year's Asian program. The Hong Kong Arts Centre was established in 1977. When Taiwan cinema was not invited for screening at the HKIFF for unstated political reasons, the Hong Kong Arts Centre played a key role in introducing Taiwan New Cinema to Hong Kong. Film Bi-Weekly, established in 1979, played a key role in coining the term Hong Kong New Wave and promoting the young filmmakers' movies. They not only interviewed the filmmakers and reported on their productions, but also organized round tables and seminars. The Hong Kong filmmaking community was small, and the film critics and writers circles were even smaller. Some of the writers and critics were also involved in film production and distribution. Writers, critics and filmmakers' names who frequently appeared in Film Bi-Weekly were also active members at various film organizations. For example, Li Cheuk-to, a prominent film critic, who worked at the Film Bi-Weekly writing extensively on the New Wave filmmakers and censorship issues, later worked at HKIFF. Wong Ain-ling moved from the Hong Kong Art Centre, to HKIFF and the Hong Kong Film Archive. Law Kar, a writer for the Chinese Student Weekly, worked at HKIFF and then the Hong Kong Film Archive. Stephen Teo worked at HKIFF and is now teaching at university. Sam Ho who worked at HKIFF also migrated to the Hong Kong Film Archive. Shu Kei, Law Wai-ming, Freddie Wong, Jerry Liu, Michael Lam and many others are film buffs who crossed multiple organizations and fields.[125] The Hong Kong Film Awards, established in 1982, played a key role in supporting the New Wave filmmakers. The first four years' winners of best film awards were all Hong Kong New Wave directors' movies. In 1982 it

was Allen Fong's *Father and Son* (1981); 1983 Ann Hui's *Boat People* (1982); 1984 Allen Fong's *Ah Ying* (1983); 1985 Yim Ho's *Homecoming* (1984).

The Hong Kong New Wave was not a self-conscious film movement with a coherent vision or manifesto to declare its members' breakaway from tradition or the commercial system. But the young filmmakers did form an informal association. One of their interesting practices was the "peer preview". The reporter of Film Bi-weekly describes, "'Peer preview' is the first screening of a director's new films to his peers. It's a chance for the young filmmakers to exchange views and learn from each other. It's not known if this is because they are humble, or they are trying to be perfect or they lack confidence that they normally invite their friends to watch their new films after the first edit. Those directors who are more brilliant will be invited to this 'peer preview'. Ann Hui and Tsui Hark are the most popular guests. The two of them have contributed in many Hong Kong productions" (Xiao "Gossip 2" 4). The reporter wrote that Allen Fong, winning the best film in Hong Kong Film Awards for his *Father and Son* (1981), should thank his peers for watching his film multiple times. Another interesting practice was the young filmmakers' interviews with each other. The questions they asked each other were more in-depth, insightful and industry-practice oriented than those from reporters. For example, the interview by Tsui Hark on Ann Hui after the preview of her *The Story of Woo Viet* (1981) covered topics like difficulty in selling new idea to financial supporters, Hong Kong society and politics, Hollywood movies, English literature, and the awkwardness of young filmmakers getting adjusted to the ingrained traditional practice in the industry (C.-t. Li "Tsui Hark"). When Tsui Hark asked how she worked with action choreographer Ching Siu-tung, Ann Hui said, "Once he arrived on the set, I would become the second assistant director…He ignored me even when I forced him to tell me his plan. It is because he is used to coming up with ideas only after arriving on location.

Once he's there, he would take charge of the whole situation. He is a bravo. I always agree with his action design because they are really good ideas…Without him telling me in advance how he would design the action, I couldn't plan the shots. But then he would hand me both the action and shots. I feel silly. I am a director but I have to rely on his shots" (C.-t. Li "Tsui Hark" 11). Tsui Hark also asked about the personalities of three cameramen and how she worked with each of them differently, indicating Tsui Hark's awareness of the significance of personality factors in Hong Kong film production.

Tsui Hark is a favorite of local film writers. In 1981, he won 5 awards in Film Bi-Weekly's 1980 Top 10 Chinese language films (see table 7.1). He didn't win the best director at Hong Kong Film Awards until 1992 for *Once Upon A Time in China*, but he always got media exposure. The editor of Film Bi-Weekly notes that on issue 13 Tsui Hark had already been interviewed twice (issue 4 and issue 13) and that was even before the release of his first film *The Butterfly Murders* on July 20, 1979 (Shu; Gao and Deng). The magazine published the entire script of the film from issue 13 to issue 16[126], covering July 5 to August 30. Back then the number of pages of the magazine was only 56 and the script took up 3 to 6 pages on each issue, and that did not include the interviews and reviews related to Tsui Hark. According to the description in a column in Film Bi-Weekly the publicity of *The Butterfly Murders* at first attempted to establish Tsui Hark as an auteur. The controversial slogan of newspaper ad was "The 1960s was King Hu. The 1970s was Chor Yuen. The 1980s is Tsui Hark". It was soon withdrawn. In the new poster, producer Ng See Yuan's name was bigger than Tsui Hark's. The Film Bi-Weekly writer was upset that the general public mistook the film as a Ng See Yuan's film. He asserts, "*The Butterfly Murders* is a Tsui Hark Film. Anyone reading Film Bi-Weekly should know" ("Butterfly Murders" 15). The writer tried to reorient his readers' to the concept of the director as the author of the film, a proposition of the French auteur theory.

Serge Daney, the editor of Cahiers du Cinema, visited East Asia in the summer of 1980 and published "a Hong Kong Journal" about the films and people he saw in Hong Kong on Cahiers du Cinema. Leung Noong-kong, scriptwriter of *The Butterfly Murder*, showed him movies of Hong Kong young filmmakrs. Zhang Qian, studied film at Censier University, and introduced him to director Allen Fong. Serge Daney was not impressed and he doubted if Hong Kong cinema could create a new wave. He wrote, "My conclusion is it is depressing. On the one hand the film industry has achieved nothing other than making a profit. And they don't care about film quality. On the other hand, this generation trained in television has no orthodox Chinese cinema tradition to rely on. In fact, their identification with China is open to question. They were born in post-war Hong Kong and studied films in the West. It wasn't until the 1970s with major events like the Cultural Revolution, Nixon visiting China and China joining the UN that many rushed to identify with the motherland. They started anew to be Chinese. Today's Hong Kong is characterized by political apathy…'A house is not a home. A colony is not a country'. As a colony Hong Kong has all the defects (an arrogant British government, lack of elections and political life). Hong Kong does not even have the hope of gaining independence" (19). Daney's comment of *The Butterfly Murders* is, "The plots are all in jumbled. I couldn't follow shortly after the film started." (20). Evaluating Hong Kong cinema with the assumption of a national cinema paradigm, Daney could only see lack and inadequacy in the works by the young filmmakers. He could not appreciate their new perspectives and contributions in the tradition of Hong Kong cinema, which in his view is less than satisfactorily Chinese.

While the Hong Kong New Wave cinema was snubbed by the editor of Cahiers du Cinema, it was well received by a prominent film critic from the neighboring islander Chinese society. In July 1982 Taiwan-Hong Kong writer and critic Chiu Kang-chien

introduced Taiwan film critic Peggy Chiao to other Hong Kong critics. Peggy Chiao had also received a film school education in the U.S.[127] The writer of the Film Bi-Weekly describes Peggy Chiao's excitement, "Chiao admires Hong Kong young directors and film critics. She is impressed that there is no noticeable conflict between the older and younger generations. The new generation is free to express itself and this is exciting. She also appreciates our magazine and says she will establish a similar film magazine in Taiwan" (Xiao "Gossip 1"). In that meeting Peggy Chiao invited Hong Kong critic Li Cheuk-to to write articles for her. She later published a film magazine and a few dozen film books in Taiwan. She was the producer of Tsai Ming-liang's film and played a key role behind the rise of Taiwan New Cinema, which led her to be dubbed the "godmother of Taiwan New Cinema". She was also involved in the screenplay (with Chiu Kang-chien) of Stanley Kwan's *Centre Stage* (aka Actress) (1992) in which Maggie Cheung won her best actress Silver Berlin Bear. She later chaired the Taiwan Golden Horse Awards. Her book The Scene of Hong Kong Cinema 1975-1986 published in 1987 in Taiwan collected articles from two dozen Hong Kong writers, covering various dimensions of the Hong Kong film industry, including the rise of the Hong Kong New Wave, the transformation of the industry, the peculiar market mechanisms, new concepts of professionalism, market research, the distribution system, genre, star systems as well as writing reviews of the films by Hong Kong directors, whom she addresses as "authors". In the article titled "Tsui Hark: a neurotic absurd world" she perceptively points out Tsui Hark's style and vision that he carried with him to the next decade. She was impressed by Tsui Hark's breathless fast-paced editing style, neurotic energy and dazzling visual effects. She claims that within Tsui Hark's entertainment comedies, there is still the same absurdity and anxiety he exhibited in his early dark films. He still set his stories in a chaotic time in Chinese history to express his political views. She concluded,

"When he is at his best performance, he always captures well the feeling of being stranded in Hong Kong society" (64). It takes a perceptive film critic from another islander Chinese society to appreciate the cultural sensibility of the orphan island in Tsui Hark's film world, instead of dismissing his films as un-Chinese or generalizing the inherent sensibility as Diaspora marginality. These two islander Chinese film industries have been forging ties since the post-war years. There was a common cultural factor for the popularity of Hong Kong cinema in the Taiwan market. The anthology ends with Li Cheuk-to's article "An era of compromise" written in 1985. Li Cheuk-to concluded that in 1984 there was no fundamental change in the Hong Kong film industry and the films in general oriented towards compromise. The commercial film institution was further consolidated. New movies of the young directors like Tsui Hark, Ann Hui, and Yim Ho became less radical than their earlier works. But Li Cheuk-to thought Tsui Hark was the best performer in straddling the divide between art and commerce. His *Shanghai Blues* was the most mature and touching among the many "political films" of that year that touched on the issue of 1997 and Hong Kong-China relationship. But Li Cheuk-to also lamented that while many filmmakers were trying hard to fit into the commercial system, maintaining personal styles but failing in the box office time after time, filmmakers like Wong Jing were making big profits. He wrote, "The current situation is filmmakers with passion and sincerity are knocked down again and again. 'Film as commercial product' becomes an unbeatable trend" ("Era" 64). Li Cheuk-to was right. In the next decade, Wong Jing and Tsui Hark stayed while most of the sincere filmmakers he mentioned faded out. Film is always a commercial product in Hong Kong cinema.

REINVENT THE SYSTEM

The unbreakable rule of Hong Kong cinema is its commercial constraints. Tsui Hark abided by the rule and was an adept manipulator of the star system and genre (the

accoutrements of commercial filmmaking). He played an important role in modernizing the Hong Kong film industry by promoting its technology, and many special effects technicians were trained through his productions. He was Hong Kong cinema's pacesetter and modernizer. Despite his training in an American film school, his work experience in major companies, and his advocacy for modernizing Hong Kong cinema, he made movies in traditional way: the artisanal mode of production. Like many filmmakers in the 1990s, he owned a film production company, worked as writer-director-producer and had great creative control over his projects. In his productions, he insisted on not having a clear division of labor. He might have asked whomever he trusted to write the script, whether they are as low-ranked as a technician, or as irrelevant as a restaurateur (Ho *Keeto Lam*). Keeto Lam, his long time protégé and colleague, started as a special effects technician, then as his scriptwriter, then as a multi-function assistant in overseas shooting. In the production of *Legend of Zu*, Keeto Lam was responsible for research, art direction and script advice, amongst other responsibilities. His title was "World of Zu"—hardly a typical job title in a film crew. In Tsui Hark's productions it was normal not to have completed the script before shooting. Constant improvisation on the set or even in the editing room and dubbing room was the norm. A tight budget and frantic schedule were the rules. In his production house there were no modern film business enterprise practices such as bank loan financing, vertical integration, conglomeration, franchising or merchandizing. Despite his prolific output, he had made no attempt to build an asset base – a film library – to heighten his bargaining power in business deals. Hark said that he was content to have the chance to keep making movies (Cindy S.C. Chan "Tsui Hark"). To him, the system of the Hong Kong film industry was about interpersonal relationships, rather than about the structure of the organization. He admitted that he was a difficult person, and his co-workers gradually learned to accommodate and work things out for

him. He said the system of the Hong Kong film industry was more about who clicked with whom, “There is not an applied method. It totally depends on whom you are working with” (Law and Lo 26). Art director Bill Lui, a relative newcomer to Tsui Hark’s team, said that he had to make an effort to figure out what Tsui Hark had in mind, as he rarely stated his intentions explicitly (Cindy S.C. Chan "Bill Lui"). Like many Chinese patriarchs, Tsui Hark was stoic and reticent, rarely expressing his feelings. His protégé-colleagues, Keeto Lam and Liu Damu, often had to act as middlemen for him. What is surprising is that none of these men said that Tsui Hark’s way of communication was old-fashioned, a nuisance, or even inefficient. Instead, they tried to adjust themselves to his ways. Over the years, those who worked closely with Hark have had to make an effort to understand him, and get used to his traditional ways of communication (Cindy S.C. Chan "Tsui Hark"). Nevertheless, in Tsui Hark’s production house, there was no alienation or greed as in a typical sweatshop of late capitalism. There was something beyond monetary rewards that motivated the co-workers to do things for each other. Tsui Hark was very paternal, loyal and caring towards his colleagues. In the seminar dedicated to Tsui Hark (The Celluoid Swordsman 2001) at the Hong Kong Film Archive, Yuan Bin said that it was Tsui Hark who revitalized the martial arts genre, and thus gave job opportunities to many action choreographers and stuntmen who otherwise would have vanished, like other group of deskilled flexible workers at the fading of that genre. Tsui Hark’s patronage was felt throughout recent Hong Kong film history: his scriptwriters Keeto Lam and Yuen Kai-chi were his students at the Hong Kong Film Culture Centre, a film club established by film buffs in the 1980s. Keeto Lam and Liu Damu had worked with him since the early 1980s, and their relationship was so close that they got involved in each other’s personal lives. Tsui Hark offered to financially support Liu Damu when he planned to go to graduate school. Their relationship was more than just a business

relationship between employer and employee, so much so that Liu Damu said he felt guilty for not working for Tsui Hark (Ho *Liu Damu*).[128] Tsui Hark's business sense was different from the assumption of profit maximization of a typical entrepreneur. For instance, Tsui Hark once made composer James Wong lose money by revising a film's music multiple times. When later the film became a hit and the music sold well, James Wong felt grateful and wanted to give Tsui Hark some of his profit, but Tsui Hark wouldn't take it (Ho *James Wong*).[129] Tsui Hark's long time editor Marco Mak volunteered to attend a pre-production meeting in order to better understand the director's ideas and the production, and Tsui Hark frequently taped movies at home for Mak, even going to the trouble of indicating which parts were good and explaining why (Ho *Marco Mak*). In their studies of the Hong Kong film industry, David Bordwell (*Planet Hong Kong*) and Michael Curtin ("Industry on Fire") are impressed by the high productivity level of Hong Kong filmmakers despite the fact that there was no monetary reward for them from the ancillary markets. In Tsui Hark's productions and Hong Kong film productions in general, it took more than the motive of profit maximization for people to stay in this industry.

HOUSEKEEPER-IN-CHIEF

Notwithstanding the bonding and warmness in this community, one can imagine how frustrating and suffocating it must be for women working in this industry, given their limited role. Liu Damu, Keeto Lam and the others who hung around with Tsui Hark always watched movies and had dinner together. They named Tsui Hark's brainstorming group "Club BBoss", the name of a night club in Hong Kong. They said it was because they were like the club girls who worked the night shift and kept the boss company. Keeto Lam said when he was working as a location scriptwriter with Tsui Hark in the U.S., he had to take care of Tsui Hark as if he were his slave girl. Keeto Lam used the

conjugal relationship to describe the close relationship between the director and the scriptwriter, explaining that this was because in Hong Kong filmmakers rarely have completed scripts and have to revise the script constantly during shooting for any contingency. The close relationship was a remedy for the defects in the system of the Hong Kong film industry in which the scriptwriter has to humble himself so that the director could fully actualize his ideas (Ho *Keeto Lam*). From the metaphors they used – club girl, slave girl, wife – one can tell how traditional their thinking is regarding gender roles.

In the work place, Tsui Hark's wife Nansun Shi took up a traditional maternal role. Sharon Hui mentioned Nansun Shi's role as the boss's wife and maternal figure in Film Workshop. She said Tsui Hark and Nansun Shi were a perfect team. Tsui Hark took care of the creative production, and Nanshun Shi took care of management. Hui said Nansun Shi's communication skills helped Tsui Hark retain a lot of relationships and networks. Their parental role in the office helped create a harmonious atmosphere, and this helped maintain close relationships (Ho *Sharon Hui*). According to Mingpao Weekly's interview with Tsui Hark, Nanshun Shi has taken care of Tsui Hark for more than twenty years as if he were her son (Shum). On various occasions James Wong also mentions how attentive Nanshun Shi was to Tsui Hark. She took care of his daily life, his personal finances, and internal and external affairs of the company. She contacted overseas film distributors, film companies, foreign press, etc. (James Wong). Raymond Wong addressed Nansun Shi as the "housekeeper" of Cinema City and called her a talented lady ("cainü"). He also acknowledged that Nansun Shi was a great help in Tsui Hark's career (R. Wong "Here Comes"). Tsui Hark himself on various occasions acknowledged Nansun Shi's contributions to his career, and more importantly her changing his perspective on life. He said his mother had a very negative view on life,

almost to the point of self-torture. “I am scared of dealing with this kind of attitude. Since at young age I thought that life was full of struggle…. It wasn’t until I met Nansun that I gradually opened up. She made me realize that life could be very happy” (D. Wei 65). But Nansun Shi was not a faceless woman behind the successful man, or an inconspicuous housekeeper working quietly in the team. In a book published in Britain titled Hong Kong Portraits of Power, Tsui Hark was interviewed, and photographed together with Nansun Shi as a power couple (Huang and Jeffery). In an interview back in 1980, Jimmy Ngai already noticed Nansun Shi had star quality as an executive, even though she worked behind the screen and kept a low profile. Nansun Shi’s background made her stand out in those years. She studied in an elite secondary school, and learned French after school. And then she studied computer science in Britain for 8 years. She returned to Hong Kong and worked as a consultant at the Michael Stevenson public relations company. Ngai notes that the clients of Michael Stevenson included major corporations. Nansun Shi described, “To feel the social pulse of Hong Kong, Michael Stevenson is a good choice. It’s a very Hong Kong company. There you can reach people from different classes” (Ngai "Nansun Shi" 14). Later she moved to the television industry. Despite her elite background she described: “TV is a good industry. It is very important in people’s lives. It provides entertainment for many people and this is significant.” She described her job in TV, “I feel like I’m a fire engine. I always have to stand by to put out fires” (Ngai "Nansun Shi" 15). In the next decade she worked in the rapidly changing film industry, where every day was a crisis management day for executives like her. Nansun Shi’s peers were also executives with star quality. In an interview in 1990 when asked to list friends she admired, Nansun Shi named: Winnie Yu, Eunice Lam, Cheung Man-yee and Selina Chow (Xia). All of them later became powerful executives. Winnie Yu became the vice president of Commercial Radio. Eunice

Lam founded the successful advertising company Wong Lam, which later was acquired by Saatchi and Saatchi. Cheung Man-yee became the first Chinese Director of Broadcasting. Selina Chow entered politics, and became a member of the Executive Council of Hong Kong and the Legislative Council of Hong Kong, and vice chair of the Liberal Party. Despite her commanding status, Nansun Shi maintained a low profile, always supportive of Tsui Hark and never overshadowing him. To James Wong, Nansun Shi was an impossibly perfect modern woman. He wrote, "Where can you find a modern woman, educated in the U.K., highly competent and resourceful, linguistically talented, willing to call her husband "laoye" (master)?...I have to crown this 20th century good woman the founder of the "husband praising sect" (59). As we shall see the female protagonist in the *Once Upon a Time in China* series is the projection of this impossibly perfect modern woman. However, the rest of the women characters in the series are faceless. Like the female scriptwriter who was recruited to the team to give some feminine (but not necessarily feminist) balance the assigned role for women was at most supplementary (Ho *Liu Damu*). Women were not a driving force in the production or in the narrative of the film. Tsui Hark's productions maintain the traditional Chinese social hierarchy of gender and seniority. Liu Damu describes Tsui Hark as very Confucian: he is paternal and takes his staff's loyalty seriously; he gives guidance and support to the young; and he appreciates his wife's competence and filial piety (Ho *Liu Damu*). This Confucian social value is readily apparent in the Once Upon A Time in China series. However much star quality Nansun Shi has as an executive, in Hong Kong cinema's director-centric production approach. and in Tsui Hark's productions in particular. She was at most a housekeeper-in-chief.

TSUI HARK'S REINVENTED STARS

Tsui Hark is good at creating heroine characters. His female protagonist often stands out amongst Hong Kong's action movies. She is usually pretty and gentle but also has masculine qualities like intelligence, cool-headedness, and most importantly she honors the traditional *yi* (the code of brotherhood or ethical code in general). Tsui Hark's *Peking Opera Blue* (1986) was made as a female version in response to John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* (1986). In *Peking Opera Blue* (1986) the Brigitte Lin character is an undercover for the revolutionary army, but her father is a warlord. She is often dressed in a man's clothing. Brigitte Lin used to play a pretty and innocent girl in romance novel-adapted films in Taiwan. Tsui Hark reinvented her star image. Her role as the cross-gender Asia the Invincible in *Swordsman II* (1992) was so impressive that a spinoff *The East is Red* was made the following year. From then on Brigitte Lin repeatedly played the cross-gender role in various productions until the fad subsided. Female protagonists in Tsui Hark films often have a masculine quality even when not obviously cross-dressing like Brigitte Lin. For example, Anita Mui in *A Better Tomorrow III* (1989) is described as a female hero with a masculine quality by critics (Feng Cai; W. He "Demythisize"). Maggie Cheung plays a pretty and innocent girl in Wong Jing's romance comedy *Romancing Star* (1987). But in Tsui Hark's martial arts films like *Dragon Inn* (1992) she is the owner of the Dragon Inn in the middle of the desert. She survives the jungle, wins the loyalty of her ethnic worker, and fights for her friend. In *Green Snake* (1993), described as "a film of alternative female heroism" she plays the chivalric Green Snake saving her sister, playing out the female version of honoring the code of brotherhood (Lu and Dai). As we shall see in the *Once Upon a Time in China* series, the female protagonist Aunt Yee, an impossibly perfect woman possessing both feminine and masculine qualities, is an amalgam of these heroines. Tsui Hark is also known for

reinventing or reviving his male friends' careers. For example, *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) revived John Woo's career, and *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987) reinvented action choreographer Ching Siu-tung as a director. The *Once Upon a Time in China* series revived Jet Li's career and reinvented his star image. Jet Li shot to fame with *The Shaolin Temple* (Zhang Xinyan, 1982). But he kept playing the same kung fu kid character, again and again, until it was no longer wanted in the market. Tsui Hark reinvented Jet Li's image as a martial arts master, more mature than his kung fu kid image, but younger than the patriarch Master Wong (played by Kwan Tak-hing) in the old Cantonese series. The *Once Upon a Time in China* series not only reinvented the star, but also Chinese history.

TSUI HARK STORY: ORPHAN ISLAND HYPERBOLE

As with most commercial films, Tsui Hark's films are sensitive to social changes (Law and Lo). During the transition period, the *Once Upon A Time In China* series explicitly dealt with issues of nationalism, modernization, colonization and westernization. It was made and released between 1991-1996. At this time, on the one hand there was the euphoric discourse of Hong Kong's achievements as a world-class city. On the other hand there was intense political anxiety expressed in a panic migration. The series is symptomatic of the ethos of Hong Kong during the late transitional period. In the protagonist's reflection on Western challenges, Western civilization is shown as having a redeeming and modernizing effect on this particular Chinese society. Westernization is presented as the cure for a backward society in this association of colonization with modernization. The protagonist's hometown Fu Shan is a stand-in for Hong Kong. On the screen, the Hong Kong Self is a hybrid wonderland, and the China Other is xenophobic. In the series Tsui Hark's criticism of feudal Chinese culture is much more poignant than his censure of the Western powers' imperialism. The central conflict of the story is not so much about the nationalistic Chinese versus the imperialist

Westerners—it is more about the open-minded Chinese in opposition to the xenophobic Chinese.

There is a significant difference between the Chinese villain and the foreign villain in characterizations and treatments of action sequences. The Western imperialists (British, American, Russian and German) are cardboard characters without much psychological depth and dialogue, whose action sequences usually take place in the first few reels, and are finished off swiftly, never to return. The Chinese villains, on the other hand, are treated with psychological depth, occupy more screen time and have more dialogue. Most important of all, in these action films, their action sequences are more elaborate, better designed, and are set at the climatic moment. The Western villains fight with Master Wong's subordinates, his students, and in those scenes the sophistication of the action choreography cannot compare to the scenes with the Chinese villains. Each Chinese villain has his own action style and weapon tailored for his character, and only the Chinese villains have a chance to fight with Master Wong one on one. A review of the six films in the series will show how the series is in fact less nostalgic about the China of the past, than congratulatory about Hong Kong as a hybrid wonderland at the present.

In part I, the Chinese villain is Yan Zhendong, a disfranchised Northerner wandering in the South. The most memorable sequence is the spectacular bamboo ladder fight scene which takes up almost ten minutes.[130] The action sequence is well integrated in the narrative. In the midst of the spectacle and frantic pace of action and editing, there is complex characterization going on: the metaphor of Yan Zhendong's vain efforts in trying to climb up the social ladder; the use of a secret weapon by a master of martial arts – indicating his corruption and loss of faith; the symbol of humiliation by having his hair cut by his opponent; letting his hair down and its loss as symbol of his loss of dignity. After the fierce fight, Master Wong still has his hair tidy and his clothing immaculate,

while Yan Zhendong is a mess. Master Wong's integrity is contrasted with Yan Zhendong's corruption. Yan Zhendong's protégé cannot stand his mentor's moral downfall. He struggles between loyalty to his mentor, and staying away from the triad gang who offers them wealth. After Yan's death, he voluntarily transfers allegiance to Master Wong and becomes a key member of the ensemble cast. In part II the Chinese villains are the members of the xenophobic and superstitious White Lotus Society, and a single Qing court official who tries to foil Dr. Sun Yat-san's revolution. The finale action sequence is set in a blind alley. The lethal weapon the Manchurian villain brings is a seemingly harmless soft object, a piece of cloth. This is an apt metaphor for the Manchurian mollification policy to assimilate the Han people. The weapon Master Wong ends up using is a bamboo stick, a symbol of nobility and integrity. Much thought has been put into designing the action to work out the metaphor of this finale sequence: fighting one's way out of a cul-de-sac by harnessing the enemy's power. Part III is set in Peking. The Chinese villain is a wealthy man who has hired a hit man to wipe out his opponents in a dragon dance competition. Much screen time is spent on the action, skill, and psychological struggle of the hit man who is later healed by Master Wong. The hit man is moved by Master Wong's forgiveness. He later becomes Master Wong's protégé and joins the ensemble cast, also happily ever after. Again in Peking, the opening shot of Part IV is the sign of the Cantonese clansman association in Peking. The villains are people of the eight major foreign powers which invade China, but we hardly see the foreigners' faces. Instead there are elaborate action sequences of Chinese villains. One group is the all-women Red Lantern Society, another superstitious xenophobic group with its slogan "support the Qing to exterminate the Westerners." The other one are two Chinese men who collaborated with German militarists. Their slogan is "destroy the Manchurian Qing dynasty and restore the Ming dynasty." The women support the Qing

against the Westerners, while the men are against the Qing and collaborate with the Westerners. They fight with each other, and the finale action scene is between Master Wong and the two Chinese men. In part V the story is set in Canton. The opening shot is the shop sign of the South China Barn. The Chinese villains are Cheung Bo Tsai, his son and his mistress, a bad woman with a blind eye. The ruthless pirates disturb the lives of people in the South. The Qing court appeases Cheung by offering him a high official post. There is collusion between the triad and the government in the North at the expense of the people in the South, and the finale action sequence is between Master Wong and Cheung's son. In part VI (*Once Upon A Time in China and America*) the story is set in America's wild west, not modern cities. Interestingly, the villain is a Mexican, but again, he is a cardboard character. The people who distrust and discriminate against the Chinese workers are American, but the people who betray Master Wong and his students are the Chinese migrant workers who are ready to surrender Master Wong to the sheriff for execution, in order to save their own lives. The one who frames Master Wong and betrays other Chinese workers for money is a Chinese. The central conflict of the story is not between the Chinese and the Americans, but amongst the Chinese.

One detail on the use of languages needs to be noted. In part VI on the Mandarin sound track, all Chinese workers' lines are dubbed in Mandarin.[131] But the only Chinese worker who stands by Master Wong, uncle Hong, speaks Cantonese on the Mandarin sound track. In Part III, on the Cantonese sound track the Empress Dowager and Qing court officials speak Mandarin, whereas all Northerners in Peking speak Cantonese with Master Wong. The difference of the Northerner and Southerner is foregrounded. In part I, on both the Mandarin and Cantonese sound tracks, the villain Yan Zhendong speaks both languages with an obvious Northerner accent, and is thus singled out as the inassimilable Northerner. In part III and IV, even the Russian and German characters speak Chinese

(Cantonese and Mandarin on respective soundtracks) without accent. Although the context of the story is the foreign invasion of China, the use of language shows that the key conflict is more about the divergence among Chinese, than between Chinese and foreign invaders. These examples show how the conflict dramatized in the series lies along the North-South axis than the East-West one. In part I, in a Western restaurant, Master Wong gives a speech about Western imperialists exploiting China's resources. In the next few minutes, the Qing court official explodes and demands that Master Wong shut up and discipline his protégés. In the story, there is no incident depicting how the Chinese suffered under the Westerner's exploitation. More story time is spent on depicting the xenophobic Chinese people and the imbecilic government. In the narrative, the threat from other Chinese is always more imminent than that from the Westerners. Throughout the series, there is no in-depth exploration of the impact of Western domination on Chinese people's lives. The Westerners recede into the background, their impact distant and containable. In the last scene of part IV, there is a moment of reflexivity. News about the imperial palace being taken by invaders and the Empress Dowager's flight comes immediately after Master Wong's team has won the lion dance competition. Master Wong sighs about the futility of winning the medal when the country falls into the hands of foreigners. That pessimistic moment is very brief. The ending is Master Wong's family deciding to go back to the South, and preparing to recover the country. In part V, the story is instantly moved back to the South, but it is not shown what they do to recover the country from the foreigners. In part VI, the story is set even further away, the Western US. The story is never set in the North during the occupation by Western powers—direct confrontation with the West is avoided in the narrative. With Master Wong saving historical figures like Li Hongzhang, exchanging medical knowledge with national father Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the Cantonese clan winning the lion

dance in Peking, the playing of Cantonese *nanyin* music, the display of Cantonese opera and Cantonese customs, the series is more a commemoration of Southern Chinese culture, celebration of Southern folk heroes and Southerners' openness to foreign cultural influences.

THE MODERN CHINESE WOMAN

Another important topic in modernization discourse that gets diverted throughout the series is gender. Instead of problematizing the woman as the one who lags behind in modernization as many older Leftist movies did, this series presents a model modern Chinese woman. One of the most noteworthy revisions of this series from the old Cantonese movies version is the insertion of a completely new character, Aunt Yee, the only female lead in the ensemble. Even though she is addressed as Aunt Thirteenth, she has no blood ties with Master Wong.[132] She later becomes Master Wong's fiancée, seemingly breaking the ancestral taboo against cross-generational marriage (especially when the woman is senior to the man). In each sequel Master Wong has to fight with ethnocentric, xenophobic and superstitious Chinese, but the threat from the West, if not receded into the background, is contained in the female body of Aunt Yee.

Aunt Yee is a fantasy of impossibly perfect, impossibly non-problematic, impossibly modern womanhood: the mysterious, awesome and threatening Western science and technology is somehow miraculously mediated and contained in this subordinate and affable woman. She introduces Western knowledge and technology to the Chinese, and thus is the enlightener, a role usually played by a man. She bears no trace of the illiterate peasant-woman character, who is usually used as a symbol of China's backwardness, a representation of the ignorance of the masses, and the object of intellectual enlightenment. Aunt Yee is educated in Britain at a time when many characters living in the capital of the country are illiterate. She has a decent Chinese name

and English names[133] while no other Chinese woman in this series has a proper name. She can switch swiftly between languages and costumes such as man, woman, Chinese, Victorian dress and cowboy outfit, and is a master of disguise. When she puts on a man's clothing, no one ever suspects that she is not a man, but none of the male characters can pass as a woman even with heavy makeup and costumes on stage. She knows everything, from sewing, cooking, and playing music to translating, operating a camera and running a newspaper, even though it is never specified what she learned and did within her two year stay in Britain. She is always a typical object of rescue in this action film, but she has no problem dodging bullets. When needed, she can instantly learn Master Wong's seizing fist and shadowless kick for self-defense, and is never a burden to the man, and never bound by social custom—her feet are not bound and her activities are not confined in the domestic sphere. As an unmarried woman, she has no moral barrier in accompanying the man in his journey everywhere. Knowledge facilitates one acquisition of power. Despite her possession of useful knowledge, Aunt Yee is not there to usurp the patriarchy or disrupt social order. She willingly returns to China in order to be with her man. Her knowledge is completely at the service of Master Wong.

In contrast to the men, Aunt Yee crosses gender, cultural and social borders with ease. The leading male characters all have various physical, linguistic, cultural or personality defects and barriers: in this film about modernization, Master Wong is stubborn and slow to change. In Po Chi Lam, the Chinese clinic-cum-martial arts school, Porky Lang is fat, hot tempered, clumsy and illiterate. As Master Wong's medical assistant, Buck Teeth Sol cannot read the Chinese on the medicine bottles. And worst of all, he does not know martial arts in this action film. Club Foot,[134] known for his magic kick, has a broken foot and crooked neck. Leung Fu, whose look and name is the most normal in the ensemble, is a womanizer and nicknamed for too many fake stances. He

does not have any luck in romance, and is not very good at martial arts. The male characters have their problems, struggles, constraints, defects, conflicts, desires and ideals, and thus in this dynamic society they can go through changes in the narrative. Compared to these male characters, Aunt Yee is already in a state of perfection. Aunt Yee is also contrasted with young Chinese girls. The opening scene of part II has a young girl chanting in the White Lotus Society, who returns in the ending to be shot to death for claiming invincibility. The first conflict starts with a group of girls on the street harassing Aunt Yee for wearing a Victorian dress. These girls never reappear in the narrative, and while they are portrayed as xenophobic and ignorant, a group of young boys from various provinces leaves home to a boarding school in Canton to learn Western knowledge. This group of male children, as the revolutionist character says, is "the hope of the country's future."

In the narrative, Aunt Yee, a modern Chinese woman, does not seem to need a future nor have a past. She does not have a life, a dream or a vision of her own. Her only mission in life is maintaining her man, Master Wong. We never see things from her perspective. The men go through struggles and the negotiation of their roles in the course of social transformation, whereas Aunt Yee's characterization is almost as static as the Western villains. Unaware of the spectacle caused by her foreign outfit, she wears a Victorian dress and takes pictures as if she were a tourist in Chinese towns. She unknowingly eats dog because she is not aware of the practice, and the other name for dog meat. While the American-born Chinese Buck Teeth Sol has difficulty speaking Chinese fluently, he does not make cultural misunderstanding mistakes like Aunt Yee does. The flashback story says she grew up with Master Wong in China, but she does not have a lived experience in this culture. While Master Wong has a father, ancestors, the clansmen and his protégés, Aunt Yee has no tie with anyone in the past. She comes from

nowhere and goes nowhere. She has no history and no future. She is the embodiment of modernization fait accompli for women.

TSUI HARK IS A MASTER

Tsui Hark reinvents stars and genres, but still matches the star and genre with the market. He was educated in American film school and introduced new technology to the Hong Kong film industry, but he operated his production house like a mom-and-pop shop, and continues the industry's apprentice system by mentoring his writers and editors like protégés. He has fallen out with directors, but maintained strong ties with big companies, assuring him financing and distribution outlets. His productions may have seemed disorganized, but in reality his orderly production-house was well managed by his wife, Nansun Shi. He has constantly improvised the story, but his brainstorming group provided substantial research support that not only helped him churn out sequels efficiently, but also helped with script quality that outclassed the copycats of other productions. He established his image as a regenerator and innovator. His production was a continuation rather than a breakaway from the tradition of Hong Kong cinema. He did not repudiate the commercial system, reject cultural tradition or challenge the patriarchy. In 2000, after sojourning in Hollywood, he made *Time and Tide*, another allegorical film that "attempts to redefine Hong Kong at the start of the new millennium" (Teo "Starting Over: Tsui Hark's Time and Tide"). The film was produced by Columbia Asia but the domestic box office was only 4 million HKD. On the screen, Wong Fei Hung, a master in martial arts is rendered powerless in the face of Western modern artillery. His love interest Aunt Yee, an embodiment of modernization, is just an illusory character. Off the screen, Tsui Hark kept transforming the Hong Kong film industry, but could not lead it out of Hollywood domination into the new millennium. Like the Monkey King, Tsui

Hark was a disciplined rebel. He pushed the envelope within the existing commercial system, without exploring and developing an alternative commercial system.

At the other extreme end of the spectrum are directors who made art films. Wong Kar Wai is one of the most successful among them. His directorial debut *As Tears Go By* (1988), starring Andy Lau and Maggie Cheung garnered over 11 million HKD in the domestic box office, and is noticeably different from mainstream gangster films of the time. It won multiple awards in the Hong Kong Film Awards. Instead of straddling the gap between art and commerce, Wong Kar Wai completely leaned towards art film production. His second film *Days of Being Wild* (1990) won even more awards, but the box office return was so disappointing that the planned sequel was canceled. Surprisingly, Wong Kar Wai continued to get funding for his next production Ashes of Time (1994) whose narrative structure was even more complex for the general audience. The domestic market of Hong Kong cinema was small. There was no art cinema theater for a segmented market, and no government support for award winning films. Wong Kar Wai's production was known for its unpredictability. How did he work efficiently and thrive in the 1990s? How did he even survive the early years? What is the Hong Kong story he tells?

Table 7.1 Tsui Hark Filmography 1979-2000

A* = adaptation, remake, sequel, series, spinoff.
Production company: CC= Cinema City; FW = Film Workshop; GH =Golden Harvest; GP = Golden Princess

Year	English Title	Role	Prod company	Release date & length	Box Office (HKD)	Awards	A*
1979	*The Butterfly Murders*	Director	Seasonal Film	Jul 20 96 min	1,152,756.20		
1980	*We're Going to Eat You*	Director script	Seasonal Film	Apr 2 90 min	Not available		
1980	*Dangerous Encounter – 1st Kind*	Director script	Fotocine	Dec 4 95 min	Not available	Best film, best director, best script, best editing, best cinematography in Film Bi-Weekly HK Film Critics' Top 10 Choice	
1981	*All the Wrong Clues (for the Right Solution)*	Director script	CC/GP	Jul 23 99 min	7,479,976	Best director, Golden Horse Awards	Y
1982	*Aces Go Places*	Actor	CC	Jan 6 93 min	26,043,773	Best actor (Karl Maka) HK Film Awards	Y
1983	*Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain*	Director	GH	Feb 5 93 min	15,872,222		Y
1983	*Aces Go Places II*	Actor	CC	Feb 5 99 min	23,273,140		Y
1983	*All the Wrong spies*	Actor	CC	Mar 31 102 min	13,782,062	Best director, Golden Horse Awards	
1983	*The Perfect Wife*	Associate producer	CC	Aug 5 95 min	12,946,443		
1983	*The Winter of 1905*	Actor	New Art	This is a Taiwan film in which Tsui Hark plays an assassin			

Table 7.1 continue

Year	English Title	Role	Prod company	Release date & length	Box Office (HKD)	Awards	A*
1984	*Aces Go Places III- Our Man from Bond Street*	Director	CC	Jan 26 94 min	29,286,077		Y
1984	*Shanghai Blues*	Director producer	FW	Oct 11 104 min	11,625,564		
1985	*Working Class*	Director producer	CC	Aug 10 99 min	16,931,337		
1985	*Yes, Madam!*	Actor	D & B	Nov 30 93 min	10,019,862		
1986	*A Better Tomorrow*	Producer	CC/FW	Aug 2 95 min	34,651,324	Best film and best actor in HK Film Awards. Best director, best actor, best cinematography, best sound recording in Golden Horse Awards	Y
1986	*Peking Opera Blues*	Director producer	CC/FW	Sept 6 117 min	17,559,357		
1987	*Final Victory*	Actor	D & B	Mar 12 98 min	5,795,427	Best editing in HK Film Awards	
1987	*A Chinese Ghost Story*	Producer	CC/FW	Jul 18 95 min	18,831,638	Best art direct-ion, ori-ginal score, original song HK Film Awards. Outstanding feature, Best adapted screenplay, supporting actor, costume design, editing Golden Horse Awards	Y

Table 7.1 continue

Year	English Title	Role	Prod company	Release date & length	Box Office (HKD)	Awards	A*
1987	*A Better Tomorrow II*	Producer story	CC/FW	Dec 12 104 min	22,727,369		Y
1988	*I Love Maria*	Producer actor	GP/FW	Mar 10 100 min	5,259,522		
1988	*The Diary of a Big Man*	Producer	CC/FW	Jul 21 88 min	19,419,529		
1988	*The Big Heat*	Producer	CC/FW	Sept 22 96 min	4,076,927		
1988	*Gunmen*	Producer	GP/FW	Oct 22 88 min	4,825,777		
1989	*The Killer*	Producer	GP/FW	Jul 6 111 min	18,255,083	Best director, best editing in HK Film Awards	
1989	*Just Heroes*	Producer	Magnum	Sept 14	7,913,329		
1989	*Web of Deception*	Producer	CC/FW	Oct 5	3,304,768		
1989	*A Better Tomorrow III* (subtitled aka *Love and Death in Saigon*)	Director Producer	CC/FW	Oct 20 119 min	18,476,116		Y
1990	*Swordsman*	Producer Executive director	GP/FW	April 5 117 min	16,052,552	Best action choreo-graphy, original film song in HK Film Awards. Outstanding feature, best supporting actor, song in Golden Horse Awards	Y
1990	*A Terracotta Warrior*	Producer, special effect director	Art and Talent Group	Apr 12	20,991,782	Best original film music in HK Film Awards	Y

Table 7.1 continue

Year	English Title	Role	Prod company	Release date & length	Box Office (HKD)	Awards	A*
1990	*Spy Games*	Producer	FW	May 10 92min	3,534,548		
1990	*A Chinese Ghost Story II*	Producer, story	GP/FW	Jul 13 103 min	20,784,824		Y
1990	*The Laserman*	Producer	FW/Peter Wang Films	Screened in the U.S. and Japan but never in Hong Kong			
1991	*The Raid*	Producer, co-director	GP/CC/FW	Mar 28 100 min	3,694,660		
1991	*A Chinese Ghost Story III*	Producer	GP/FW	Jul 18 107 min	15,018,584.		Y
1991	*Once Upon a Time in China*	Director, producer, script	GH/FW	Aug 15 139 min	29,672,278	Best director, best editing, best original film score in HK Film Awards	Y
1991	*The Banquet*	Director, script	No prod company	Nov 11 97 min	21,921,687	Fund-raising project for disaster relief in China	Y
1992	*Twin Dragon*	Co-director	GH/HK Directors' Guild	Jan 25 104 min	33,225,134	Fund-raising project for the HK Directors' Guild	
1992	*Once Upon a Time in China II*	Director Producer	GH/FW	Apr 16 120 min	30,399,676	Best action choreography HK Film Awards. Best music Golden Horse Award	Y
1992	*The Master*	Director producer script story	GH/Vast Art Film/FW	May 28 93 min	8,096,542		Y
1992	*The Wicked City*	Producer script	GP/FW	Nov 20 96 min	10,778,465		
1992	*Swordsman II*	Producer script	GP/Long Shong/FW	Jun 26 109 min	34,462,861		Y

Table 7.1 continue

Year	English Title	Role	Prod company	Release date & length	Box Office (HKD)	Awards	A*
1992	*Dragon Inn*	Producer script	Seasonal Film/FW	Aug 27	21,505,027	Best action choreography in Golden Horse Awards	Y
1992	*King of Chess*	Producer co-director	GP/FW	Sept 25 109 min	1,151,165		
1993	*The East is Red*	Producer script	GP/Long Shong/FW	Jan 21 98 min	11,248,503		Y
1993	*Once Upon a Time in China III*	Producer director script music	GH/FW	Feb 11 138 min	27,540,561		Y
1993	*Once Upon a Time in China IV*	Producer script	GH/FW	Jun 10 102 min	11,301,790		Y
1993	*The Magic Crane*	Producer script	Long Shong/FW	Aug 19 94 min	8,159,384		Y
1993	*Iron Monkey*	Producer script	GH/Long Shong/FW	Sept 3 86 min	6,977,084		Y
1993	*Green Snake*	Producer director script	Seasonal Film/FW	Nov 4 99 min	9,497,865		Y
1994	*Burning Paradise*	Producer	GH/DLO Film/ Silver Medal	Mar 26 104 min	1,819,697		Y
1994	*The Lover*	Producer director script	GH/FW	Aug 13 107 min	18,643,478	Best original film music in HK Film Awards	Y
1994	*Once Upon a Time China V*	Producer director music	GH/FW	Nov 17 101 min	4,902,426		Y
1994	*Forging the Swords*	Producer	Beijing Film Prod/FW	87 min	Not released in HK		
1995	*The Chinese Feast*	Producer director script	Mandarin Films/FW	Jan 28 107 min	31,128,196		

Table 7.1 continue

Year	English Title	Role	Prod company	Release date & length	Box Office (HKD)	Awards	A *
1995	*Love in the Time of Twilight*	Producer director script	GH/ERA Int'l/FW	Apr 13 104 min	5,127,958		
1995	*The Blade*	Producer director prod manager script editor	GH/FW	Dec 21 102 min	3,308,775		
1996	*Tri-Star*	Ex.producer director script	Mandarin FilmsCC/FW	Feb 15 110 min	25,218,150		
1996	*Shanghai Grand*	Producer	Win's/FW	Jul 13 96 min	20,837,056		
1996	*Black Mask*	Producer script	Win's/FW	Nov 9 98 min	13,288,788		
1997	*Once Upon a time in China and America*	Producer	Win's	Feb 1 92 min	30,268,415		Y
1997	*Double Team*	Director	Columbia P	93 min	3,798,730		
1997	*A Chinese Ghost Story – The Tsui Hark Animation*	Producer script	FW/Polygram K. K./Win's/Cathay Asia	Jul 26 84 min	8,163,420		Y
1997	*Knock Off*	Director	FW/ Knock Films/A.V.V. & MDP Worldwide	Sept 10 91 min	Not available		
2000	*Time and Tide*	Producer director script	Columbia Asia	Oct 19 116 min	4,465,047		

The information of this table is from:

1. Sam Ho and Ho Wai-leng (ed) The Swordsman and His Jiang Hu – Tsui Hark and Hong Kong Film, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2002
2. Hong Kong Film Archive – Collection Items Online Catalogue (http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/HKFA/en/6.php)
3. Hong Kong Films Yearbook (From 1989 to 1998), Hong Kong Kowloon & New Territories Motion Picture Industry Association (MPIA)
4. *Dangerous Encounter – 1st Kind* "Hong Kong Film Critics' Top 10 Choice" Film Bi-Weekly issue 53, Jan 31, 1981. p.3-

Chapter 8 Wong Kar Wai The Pragmatic Idealist

Wong Kar Wai is the most award-winning director in Hong Kong and is internationally renowned. His first film *As Tears Go By* (1988), a box office hit with 10 nominations among the 14 categories in the Hong Kong Film Awards, instantly caught the Hong Kong film industry insiders' attention. His second film *Days of Being Wild* (1990) won most of the major awards in Hong Kong and Taiwan. With a production cost of nearly 40 million HKD and six top stars, the film gained only a 9.5 million HKD in the domestic box office. The plan for part II was canceled. Wong Kar Wai continued to get funding for his next project *Ashes of Time*, winning the 51st Venice Film Festival Ozella D'oro prize. But with eight major stars, shot for two years and at an alleged production cost of 38 million, the film gained only a 9 million HKD in the domestic market. In 1997 at the 50th anniversary of Cannes, Wong Kar Wai won the best director award for *Happy Together*. In 2000, *In the Mood for Love* won the best actor (Tony Leung) and technical achievement prizes at Cannes, and at present has 21 awards. All of Wong Kar Wai's films won multiple awards in local and international film awards venues with no exception (see table 8.1 and table 8.2). Since his directorial debut, Wong Kar Wai, and his films and his productions have been characterized by media buzz.

Wong Kar Wai came from a film industry known for its kung fu flicks in Western markets. The industry had no government support for award winning directors, the system was extremely commercial, the domestic market was small and there was no segmented market for home-grown art films. Hong Kong cinema did not have a strong tradition of art house cinema. King Hu, whose *A Touch of Zen* (1971) won the Technical Grand Prize, and was nominated for the Palme d'Or at the 1975 Cannes Film Festival, was groomed by the Shaw Studio. Independent filmmaker Tong Shu-shuen made only

four films. Her first film *The Arch* (1969), a costume drama depicting oppression of women in Chinese tradition, was invited to the Cannes Film Festival's Directors' Fortnight Section[135]. Her second film *China Behind* (1974) focused on the Chinese Cultural Revolution, a repressed topic of the time, and was banned by the colonial government. Her third film *Sup Sap Bup Dap* (1975)[136] is a social comedy on the Hong Kong people's obsession with gambling, and her fourth film *The Hong Kong Tycoon* (1979) is a melodrama. There is no apparent thematic or aesthetic consistency in her oeuvre, a prerequisite quality of an auteur, as Yau Ching comments (Yau). In an article studying Tong Shu-shuen's career, Lau Shing-hon concludes, "Sad but true, the concern over box office and politics puts a formidable constraint on Hong Kong cinema."(103-05) Local film critics saw her socially critical art films' influence in the Hong Kong New Wave generation. Tsui Hark's *Dangerous Encounter – 1st Kind* (1980), depicting an anarchic Hong Kong, was banned by the colonial government and Tsui Hark switched to Cinema City's mass entertainment for his next project. Ann Hui's *The Boat People* (1982), depicting Vietnamese life after the Vietnam War, was withdrawn from circulation due to political reasons. The New Wave generation filmmakers either faded out after a few films or merged into the mainstream by straddling the gap between art and commerce. The New Wave phenomenon lasted for only a few years. Wong Kar Wai did not have a peer group of young directors supporting each other like the previous generation. As Jimmy Ngai points out, in Hong Kong there was not even a producer like Taiwan's Chan Hsiung-chih supporting young directors, and Wong Kar Wai had to fight the battle by himself (Ngai *Four Films*). But making movies in Hong Kong during the politicized transitional period, Wong Kar Wai obviously was not just some kind of auteur living an apolitical intellectual life, and one whose subjectivity transcended history, as is assumed by some 1950s French Cahiers critics. Unlike the Hong Kong New Wave

generation, Wong Kar Wai leaned completely towards art film production, instead of compromising or nudging for small changes. *Days of Being Wild*, despite the suggestion of rebellious youth and action in the title (see table 8.1 for the meaning of its Chinese title), deviates drastically from plot-driven action-packed (or verbal gag-packed) mainstream Hong Kong cinema. The convolute narrative structure of *Ashes of Time* is even more alienating for general audiences. *Fallen Angel* was shot completely with wide angle lenses distorting the pretty faces of its stars. *Happy Together* revolves around the relationship problems of a gay couple, hardly a topic for mainstream viewers. *In the Mood for Love*, a gloomy *wenyi* (roughly meaning drama or melodrama) set in the 1960s, is not an uplifting entertainment to a Hong Kong audience badly hit by the regional financial crisis. Wong Kar Wai is an oddity in the history of, and in contemporary Hong Kong cinema.

Wong Kar Wai's role as a square peg in a round hole began before he became a director. Raymond Wong described vividly what an oddball Wong Kar Wai was in his memoire. Wong Kar Wai was a scriptwriter on the payroll at Cinema City but didn't go to the office or produce a page for several months. The crew was waiting for his script. Wong Kar Wai's explanation was that he needed to put aside everything and get away from everyone in order to write an excellent story. Raymond Wong responded, "Buddy, the one sitting in front of you is not a boss of a garment factory. I'm also a scriptwriter!...You know. I wrote *Papa, Can You Hear Me Sing?* in 2 days; *The Occupant* in 3 days. Even the record breaking *Aces Go Places* took me only one week…I am giving you two weeks to finish the script." Wong Kar Wai handed in the script in one month and the director said it was useless. Wong Kar Wai was fired ("This Time We Passed a Talent" 71-72; "Our Loss! Our Loss!" 73-74). Nevertheless he worked as a scriptwriter for six years before taking up the director position.

Wong Kar Wai's first film *As Tears Go By* was made in 1988 in an era when the problem of stars being overbooked was serious and caused chaos in many productions. In 1988, Maggie Cheung made 11 films and Andy Lau made 9 films, being in the second and third places of the top box office actors respectively (Q. Li 5-6). Wong Kar Wai was no less chaotic than his stars. His long time collaborators art director William Chang and cinematographer Christopher Doyle know best. William Chang described how Wong Kar Wai muddled through the first day of shooting of his very first film: "On the first day of filming, I got a call from Wong Kar Wai. He said he had overslept and hadn't done the scene breakdowns! I rushed to him and said, 'The crew don't have a clue about the film and no one knows what you're filming today. Just try to get by and make things up tomorrow." William Chang gave director Wong Kar Wai more precise direction. He said, it was "(t)he opening scene where Andy Lau gets up to answer the phone. It was a simple scene and I assured him, 'Just take a few more shots. No one knows how they will be used. No need to panic!'" (Zhang et al. 39) Since then, not letting the cast and crew know what he was filming became Wong Kar Wai's signature filmmaking style. Wong Kar Wai didn't divide the work step by step. He wrote the script during the shooting and he also started editing the film during the shooting. He was notorious for starting shooting with a sketchy script, then steering his actors through a prolonged process of improvisation and revision. Christopher Doyle wrote in 1996 in his production journal during the protracted shoot of *Happy Together*, "Christmas in Argentina no longer sounds like a crew in-joke. Shirley Kwan and Zhang Zhen (Chang Chen) have arrived to join the cast – what we're starting to call the 'casualty list'. They idle in their rooms waiting for their roles to materialize, while Wong (Kar Wai) hides in nearby coffee shops hoping for the same." (Doyle "To the End" 17) In the release version, the footage of Shirley Kwan's character was edited out. Philippe Lee, associate producer of *Crouching*

Tiger Hidden Dragon (Ang Lee, 2000) and professionally trained in Japan and the U.S., when asked how he would work in a Wong Kar Wai's production replied, "I love Wong Kar Wai's films. I would rather just watch his films." (Cindy S. C. Chan)

Wong Kar Wai's delay impacted not only the cast and crew in the production department, but also caused chaos in the subsequent sectors. On December 14, 1990 at 9:30 p.m. the premiere of *Days of Being Wild* was held at A. C. Hall, Hong Kong. After various rituals and speeches, Alan Tang, producer and investor of *Days of Being Wild* got to the stage and said to the audience, "We have only 7 reels that have arrived at A. C. Hall. The 8th and 9th reels are still being processed in the lab. Later if the film is interrupted, we may have to invite our stars to do a live performance to entertain our guests and audience." (Ngai *Four Films* 35) Jimmy Ngai described Alan Tang as sounding so calm that it looked like he was just joking. After the premier Wong Kar Wai reedited the film for general release. In an interview in 1992, Alan Tang revealed how rushed it was, "It was so rushed that I had to roll up my sleeves and help out. Everyone had to help out. Golden Princess (distribution company) almost wet their pants. I was nervous too. It will be launched in the entire Taipei market with a few hundred copies and two theater chains in Hong Kong. All the labs have to put aside everything and just do the printing of the 300 copies of *Days of Being Wild*." (W.-m. Law 50) Ten years later in 2000, Wong Kar Wai finished *In the Mood for Love* at the last minute and came with his print to Cannes. In the 2001 Cannes Film Festival interview by Gilles Ciment, in response to that incident, Wong Kar Wai said, "(W)e were the last film showing in the festival. We arrived the day before the last day. Our print was still in Paris, (where they were) doing the electronic press kit. So even I hadn't seen the finished film. It was a terrible experience, but very exciting. But I don't want to try that again." (Brunette 129-30) In 2004, *2046*, one of the most anticipated films at Cannes, was scheduled to premier

at the film festival. Like 14 years ago in Hong Kong, the reels arrived straight from the laboratory but this time it caused a delay in the festival schedule and the incident was publicized internationally.

In the 1990s Wong Kar Wai created a puzzling phenomenon in Hong Kong. He had drawn a heated cultural debate between two camps. One camp dismissed his work as "boring art cinema" and the other put him on a pedestal. In the tradition of the modest financial approach for non-mainstream film production in Hong Kong, Wong Kar Wai's filmmaking was considered lavish by that standard. In a film industry with a long established practice of low budget quickies, the camp dismissing him usually accused him of being wasteful for shooting films like draft papers, selfish for overrunning the budget and not watching out for his investor's interests, self-indulgent for neglecting the general audience, and self-centered for not respecting the actors' tight schedule, etc. At the other extreme, there was the phenomenon of a collective pilgrimage to his film's premier[137] and mountains of reviews everyday reading deep meaning into his movies. Wong Kar Wai has such a god-like status in Hong Kong cinema, and his thematic and aesthetic consistency was so apparent, that there were many young art film director wannabes imitating his style. Lin Dake in studying the influence of Wong Kar Wai lists the five characteristics of Wong Kar Wai's style: 1. Voice over narration from multiple perspectives. 2. Non-linear narrative. 3. MTV visual image. 4. Actor's incommunicado acting style. 5. Cramped space. (D. Lin "Homage") Lin Dake describes that Wong Kar Wai's influence was so striking that even older filmmakers unwittingly picked up some of his style.

Having a home grown director recognized in top rank international film festivals somehow helped elevate Hong Kong cinema's status in the world and redeem the city from any stigma as a "cultural desert". However, there was also concern about issues of

cultural identity and international politics in international film festivals. Wong Jing, regarding Jackie Chan as the only filmmaker contributing to Hong Kong cinema in the international market, has reservations. He said, "Wong Kar Wai also has a contribution to Hong Kong cinema. But strictly speaking, his movies are not so 'Hong Kong cinema'. They are products of international financing." (Ernie Au 37) Besides the charge of the films being commercially prompted by international capital, Wong Kar Wai winning the best director in Cannes in 1997 also drew suspicion that the votes were being motivated by international politics. On May 15, 1997 before the award was announced, Wong Kar Wai and Christopher Doyle were interviewed by more than 20 international media in less than 24 hours after they arrived at Cannes. Christopher Doyle told a Hong Kong reporter in Cannes, "Those foreign media kept asking us about the 1997 issue…They asked me if winning the award was important. Of course I said winning was not important and it was more valuable to be present and learn from each other." (X. Wang) After the result was announced, amidst the celebratory atmosphere, newspapers in Hong Kong suspected that political factors were involved. For example in a newspaper article on May 20, the writer reported Wong Kar Wai winning the best director and *Ice Storm* (Ang Lee, 1997) winning the best screenplay, and said that the Chinese directors' performance in that year was a pleasant surprise (Dai). The writer didn't mention James Schamus as the writer of *Ice Storm,* but instead reported the hearsay that the films of Ang Lee and Wong Kar Wai success in the competition, was due to the 1997 factor. And *The Taste of Cherries* (Abbas Kiarostami) sharing the Palme d'Or with *The Eel* (Shohei Imamura) might also be politically motivated because the Iranian film was banned by the Iranian government until shortly before the opening of the film festival. A writer from a Hong Kong English newspaper further played up the political dimension. After quoting Wong Kar Wai's words about the award's special meaning to Hong Kong in 1997, she reported the

banning of the poster from public places in Hong Kong and the banning of the homosexually–themed *East Palace, West Palace* (Zhang Yuan) in China. The Chinese authorities confiscated Zhang Yuan's passport to stop him from attending Cannes, and pulled Zhang Yimou's *Keep Cool* from its world premiere at Cannes to protest against the showing of Zhang Yuan's film. Taiwan producer and film critic Peggy Chiao is more explicit in her political reading of *Happy Together*. She states that the film is "actually a 'tale of three cities'…The underlying truth is about the mass departures from Hong Kong, its 1997 anxieties. The love, the desolation and the breaking-up of the lovers contains profound significance in the complicated relationship between Beijing – Taipei – Hong Kong. Although Wong Kar-wai's political message is extremely subtle and intricate, nevertheless to present *Happy Together* on the eve of the 1997 takeover, was undoubtedly not an accident." (P. H.-p. Chiao 17) Chiao described that Hong Kong was in a state of impending disappearance and worried about its creative freedom in the future. She wrote, "The borrowed time, the borrowed freedom, all these will remain seared in one's memory after the takeover ceremony. There might not be an opportunity to make films on homosexuals." (P. H.-p. Chiao 20) She also mentioned the problems with Wong Kar Wai's next film *Summer in Beijing* because Chinese censor insisted the completed film would have to be exactly like the original approved script.

After the sovereignty change, the international media buzz about 1997 gradually faded. In 2000 Hong Kong was slow to recover from the regional financial crisis. Wong Kar Wai aborted the *Summer in Beijing* project, and went back to make a loose sequel to *Days of Being Wild*. *In the Mood for Love* (2000) premiered at Cannes. With its story of a suppressed love affair, and two dozen dazzling cheongsams: the film was like an exhibition of Asian femininity and a parade of exotic fashion. The recurrence of the repressed Chinese woman of Chinese films in Cannes is as predictable as the Dragon

Lady in Hollywood. International film festivals have catapulted Wong Kar Wai into world-wide fame and sustained his career. In response to Hollywood's domination, European countries fortify national cinemas and the film festival circuit as an alternative system. Art cinema as institution is no less commercial and the movies are no less commodities. With his auteur cult status, themes of urban alienation, and non-linear narrative, is Wong Kar Wai's art film an extension of European art cinema? Is the case of Wong Kar Wai an art cinema version of cultural imperialism, that is, with Europe dominating major international film festivals where non-European art films have to conform to the standards and rules of European art cinemas? Is Wong Kar Wai's stylish film just empty spectacle, hollow style and pointless formal experiment? With his pattern of overrunning both budget and schedule, how did Wong Kar Wai thrive in the competitive environment in the 1990s? How did he even survive in the early years? With his habitually chaotic way of working, how did he even finish a project? What Hong Kong story did he tell?

Wong Kar Wai, unlike the classic auteur depicted as artist transcending history and studio system, is a pragmatic idealist. He is a situated author working inside the political parameters and commercial system of Hong Kong cinema and the international film festivals. In making commercially viable, politically feasible and culturally accessible art films, he balanced between novelty and utility. One the one hand he looked at things in a new way, made use of new opportunities beyond the traditional markets, explored new dimensions of his stars and pushed his collaborators to new horizons. On the other hand, he adopted the think-inside-the-box pragmatic approach. He factored in the specific, enduring parameters of Hong Kong film production, to determine what different stakeholders would accept, and sought to recognize a variety of the written and unwritten rules of his profession. He adopted a personal approach: he made himself

knowledgeable about his personnel and the status quo, and capitalized on the trust and appreciation of his long time collaborators. His cast and crew fell in with his wishes and he wrote scripts tailor-made for his stars, and provided creative space and public recognition for his collaborators. He has developed a personal style with influences from European art cinema, Asian and Latin American literature, as well as the Hong Kong mainstream cinema's extravagant style and neurotic energy. Beneath his relationship dramas of unrequited love and the incommunicado persona, is his story of the orphan island vanity: the yearning for home and its disillusion. His characters, nameless or with forgettable ordinary names, are delusional in their autonomy like a legless bird, and their homes are as undependable as a rootless tree. Wong Kar Wai's story is about the sense of insecurity in this orphan island in a decade when it was celebrated as a cosmopolitan city while ruled as a colony. His oeuvre is his poignant comment on the elusiveness of official discourse, and emptiness of mainstream media representation of Hong Kong in a decade defined by the sovereignty change, a historical event imbued with the rhetoric of European imperialism, national redemption and Asian modernity.

"KAR WAI" AS GUARDIAN OF HOME

Wong Kar Wai was born in 1958. He wears sunglasses to enhance his mystique but doesn't use a pseudonym. Wong Kar Wai is his birth name. "Kar" means home and "Wai" means guardian. Unlike the previous New Wave generation directors or his mixed race, multicultural, foreign educated stars and crew, Wong Kar Wai was not educated overseas and did not have any migration experience in the West. He is locally educated and locally trained. He studied graphic design at Hong Kong Polytechnics. In 1981 he entered the production training class of a local television TVB. In 1982 he started as a

screenwriter and in 1988 he directed his first film. Despite his local background he is mentally a nomad. In explaining the theme of remembrance in his films he described his own childhood among the Shanghai émigré community in Hong Kong. He said, "We were always prepared, as kids, that we would move on, to someplace else or back to Shanghai. There was no sense that you belonged to this place or city." (Arthur 41) Paradoxically, in the official rhetoric of "moving on" in the new millennium, it is this mental nomad and his team who guarded the memory of this city, and documented the affective dimension of its history on celluloid. His career path also showed such nomadic pattern. Wong Kar Wai did not divide his work step by step and did not plan his career step by step either. Every time he reached a point of no return, he took up the next role: from writer to director, and then set up his company and worked as his own producer. From straddling the gap between art and commercial films, to change to lean completely to art cinema, and strode forward into international film festivals. Wong Kar Wai's filmmaking approach and career moves were not planned ahead. At every phase he staked everything on a single throw, and there was no holding back or turning back. To understand Wong Kar Wai's productions, it's best to start with his collaborators, who gave their all to his projects without holding back.

WONG KAR WAI'S COLLABORATORS

The common characteristics of Wong Kar Wai's collaborators are they are very close, appreciate each other's work quality, eccentric work style and need for creative space. Each of them is known for being an idealist. The following brief descriptions of financial supporter Alan Tang, editor Patrick Tam, art director William Chang, cinematographer

Christopher Doyle, and stars Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung will help us understand how Wong Kar Wai worked.

Alan Tang

Alan Tang was a key person in Wong Kar Wai's start as a director. In the Hong Kong *pianhua* financing system, there was no requirement for a completed script, executive meeting to green-light a project, completion bond or bank executive to guard the production from overrunning either budget or schedule. Alan Tang was an important factor that enabled Wong Kar Wai to carve out a space in the commercial system of Hong Kong cinema. Alan Tang appreciated Wong Kar Wai's talents, and supported his first and second films. A brief study of his background and personality will illuminate for us why he was so supportive of Wong Kar Wai. Alan Tang was addressed as "Big brother" in the industry, because of his generosity in helping friends and being protective toward his juniors. He once asserted, "Friends are my real biggest assets." (Chen and Law 50) He was a major star in Cantonese cinema in the 1960s and nicknamed "the student prince" after the popularity of his first film *The Student Prince* (Mok Hong-si, 1964). He continued to play his Prince Charming role after moving to Taiwan. He described his days in Taiwan: "For seven years I kept making romance films. I was so fed up that I wanted to puke. I returned to Hong Kong and set up my production company." (Chen and Law) He produced mostly gangster films, and he starred in some as a masculine gangster, but female characters in his films usually had a bigger role, in contrast to John Woo's male bonding gangster films. Alan Tang responded, "A masculine gangster film is plain. If the male characters' friendship is too sublime, it will be like a

gay relationship. We like to have a more human touch, even for gangster films. We emphasized more on humanity. This film (*Return Engagement*, Jo Cheung 1990) focuses more on a father-daughter relationship. That's because the audience likes this theme and it's more family audience friendly." (Feng Cai) *As Tears Go By*, a relationship drama involving the gangster's great aunt and female cousin at the opening sequence, obviously would catch Alan Tang's attention. The big brother Wah (Andy Lau) risking his life to protect his little brother Fly (Jacky Cheung) was an expression of *yi* (the code of brotherhood), a value Alan Tang most probably would buy. Critics often question Wah's blind loyalty to a trouble-making little brother. In an interview in 1988 in response to the reporter's request for the reason for the two men's bonding, Wong Kar Wai explained it away with a "time factor". He said, "There is something very difficult to write, such as, why a man likes a woman or the close relationship of two men. But I want to propose that time is the most important factor. Say, if in an extended period of time I spend time with you. I open my calendar and see traces of you everywhere. That relationship gradually builds up. I don't know why I want to help you but I did it." (Le "Wong as Tears") The explanation for Wah's action may lie outside the text. The film's critical and commercial success probably motivated Alan Tang to finance his next project. In response to the box office fiasco of *Days of Being Wild*, Alan Tang was protective of Wong Kar Wai. He said, "I am the type of person who wants to do things well. I rarely work under budget…I was not neglectful. If I wanted to see the rushes, no one could stop me… The story constantly changed and they always tried different printing effects. The director hadn't seen the entire film and no one had. So we should not put all the blame on Wong Kar

Wai. Even though this film lost a lot of money, Wong Kar Wai is still a good kid…I went through the 1960s. I know better than the younger generation. So if we wanted to make it look real, it would take a lot of money. If I didn't sign the check, they couldn't move on with the filming. I wanted to do things well. I know it was not wise and cost effective to make a nostalgic film in Hong Kong…. Overseas investors like me because I will only do things better and make their money's worth. This is my principle." (Chen and Law 50) Alan Tang emphasized his trust of Wong Kar Wai as his motive for letting the team continue the filming.

Patrick Tam

Patrick Tam edited *Days of Being Wild* and *Ashes of Time*. It was no easy job since Wong Kar Wai had no preconceived notion of what the films would be during the shooting. Patrick Tam was one of the leading members of the Hong Kong New Wave. Wong Kar Wai described how he worked with Patrick Tam, "For most people, I think editing is like building up a film. For me it is the reverse. I discount a lot of material, break it down. I shoot a lot and throw a lot away…I'm not sure what I want to find…I only know the things I don't like, what has to go. At the end, I discover the solid materials, put them in order, and finally seek out the thing that I want to say. This way of working came from my second film, *Days of Being Wild*. We have to release the film at Christmas and I was still shooting on December 17th. So I asked one of my best friends Patrick Tam to edit for me. I told him to treat the film as if he hated it, to throw everything he didn't like away. We didn't have any contact while he was editing. At the end of the shoot he sent me a tape and said, 'I've finished the first 70 minutes of the

film.' I was very happy with it. It was a very memorable moment." (Havis "Interview Wong Kar-Wai – One Entrance Many Exits" 16) Patrick Tam stated that editing Wong Kar Wai's films was an enjoyable experience because of the high quality of his visual material (art direction, lighting and cinematography) and the freedom. Wong Kar Wai didn't give him any absolute guidelines. Tam said, "He only gave me the films and told me to fix it. The good thing is for an action he would take various versions of shots. For example in the scene of the Leslie Cheung character entering the kiosk, he had taken a wide shot, a close up and a hand-held shot from the back…altogether from 8 different angles. I have a lot of options. It was like I was doing the scene breakdown and structured the scene for him. He had different takes for an action. My choice will affect the mise-en-scene and the overall feel of the movie. I usually follow my intuition." (Pun) Patrick Tam relished how he connected the disconnected sequences. He said Wong Kar Wai shot many random sequences which were unrelated to the plot such as the close up of a clock, the lowering of the store gate, the Leslie Cheung character idling on bed, and dancing the Cha Cha in front of the mirror, and he had no idea where to put them in the film when he shot them. Later Wong Kar Wai gave Patrick Tam the now famous "legless bird" monologue. Patrick Tam connected the shots with the monologue, and showed the erratic behavior and contrast of this character: one moment he was so decadent idling on a bed, and the next moment he was enjoying life. The ending sequence was Tony Leung's gambler character preparing to go out. The sequence was not related to the plot. Patrick Tam explained, "Back then the film was sold under the *pianhua* system. Wong Kar Wai gave his investor the cast list and thus has to put the Tony Leung sequence in, by

whatever means. Wong Kar Wai liked that shot and I liked it too because Tony Leung's acting was very precise. Wong Kar Wai suggested putting it at the end as a promo, trailer or teaser. I said to him, 'No need to do the promo. Just put it at the end of the film.'…This sequence is like a repudiation of all the events and characters before him. His appearance signals a new start: this man lives alone and he was preparing to start anew." (287) William Chang said it was a bold decision for Patrick Tam to end the film this way, "It became very special when we knew there wouldn't be a sequel – imagine a completely new character stealing the show in the last scene! It was Patrick Tam's editing touch, never seen before in Hong Kong." (41) Patrick Tam said during the filming of *Ashes of Time*, whenever an actor could go to the desert location in China, Wong Kar Wai would instantly write a sequence for him or her to do the shooting. In dealing with a tremendous amount of material without a preconceived structure, Patrick Tam said, "The guild line I gave myself was to follow the character: should the character do this? Does the editing match the character's emotion?" (Pun 288) It is hard to imagine how anyone outside Wong Kar Wai's inner circle could edit his films and accommodate his work style. It took Patrick Tam about a month to edit *Days of Being Wild* and one year for *Ashes of Time*. Patrick Tam didn't edit for Wong Kar Wai after that. He said, "He (Wong) has asked me to edit *Fallen Angel*. But I'm not interested to go on. Firstly, it dragged on for too long. Secondly, after I finished editing *Ashes of Time*, he asked William Chang to do some fine cuts. William Chang added the opening desert ambient shot. I think if you want me to do it, you have to let me be responsible from the beginning to the end. We are very close friends, but this is creative work. If you want some fine-

tuning, it's better to let me do it. Maybe he needed the other people's perspectives. You can say that I am a perfectionist. I can do the editing for you frame by frame, very detailed. I will spend a lot of time to reflect on it. But if you want me to change according to another person's point of view, I feel uncomfortable…" (289)

William Chang

William Chang, having enlivened many works of the Hong Kong New Wave directors, is regarded as "the single most influential art director/production designer in Hong Kong." (Jacob Wong 3) He worked not only as an art director in Wong Kar Wai's star studded productions, but sometimes also as editor and more importantly as a partner in the conception of the projects. He was born in Hong Kong in 1953 and his parents came from Shanghai. His career has been steady with no major ups or downs. He worked as Tong Shu Shuen's assistant director on *Sup Sap Bup Dup* (1975) and *The Hong Kong Tycoon* (1979), a useful experience when Wong Kar Wai asked him to take over the editing of his first film. He said, "I'd tried my hand at most things working under Shu Shuen and learned a bit about editing watching over her shoulder" (Zhang et al. 40) In 1978, when film was still perceived as an illegitimate business, he went to study film in Canada. There was neither enthusiastic parental support nor a young rebellious struggle. He said, "I didn't like school but would go to the cinemas four or five days a week. When I told him (father) I wanted to enroll in a film studies course, he said fine but told me not to tell the other relatives." (34) After returned to Hong Kong, he worked as designer. His cover designs for City Magazine were described as legendary for creating a Hong Kong cosmopolitan look (Lee and Li). Doing the art direction for the photo shoot of movie stars

and celebrities probably enriched his experience in handling stars. A writer of the magazine described William Chang as an easy-going person, and yet also an extreme perfectionist (Deng). In 1981 William Chang worked in Patrick Tam's *Love Massacre*, a film that established the art director post in Hong Kong cinema (Zhang et al.). He was introduced to Wong Kar Wai by Patrick Tam and they instantly became friends. The two met for five-days-a-week in the same coffee shop from 11 pm to 5 am for a few years. He said, "We could talk on almost anything and everything: films, books, a pretty dress, and liked the same scene of a movie. Turns out he too was a regular of the cine clubs in his teens. I suspect we actually sat at the same screening of some films though we didn't cross paths." (39) They share favorite directors and life experiences. William Chang said, "Godard, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Satyajit Ray, some Japanese masters. Each time, we would choose a different director from a different country for discussion. We also talked about New Wave in France, Italy, Germany, and Japan in the 1960s." (39) "My parents didn't let me go out so I stayed at home most of the time. Wong Kar Wai lived in Tsim Sha Tsui and he could go out freely. He saw and knew so much more than I did…We had some different experiences to share and talk about. *Days of Being Wild* was as much his brainchild as mine." (41)

William Chang, an important partner in Wong Kar Wai's creative process, said, "I treat Wong Kar Wai no differently than others but there is a magical spark not found in others' films." (40) Being there for Wong Kar since his first film, he described how they worked in the beginning, "He had the plot thought out before discussing it with me. The shooting script had been more or less completed before filming started. It lacked only an

ending. The years of watching films, our likes and dislikes…were all poured into this debut film. There were so many possibilities to explore. When I work for other films, I don't get involved in the screenplay. It is different with Wong Kar-wai. We talk the story through. In the preparation of each shoot, he usually comes up with several stories for us to discuss and choose. We keep discussing the script while shooting the film." (39) That probably was the most organized production of Wong Kar Wai.

They shared not only a Shanghaiese immigrant family background, but also values, a world view and a mode of working. William Chang is professional and yet playful. On the one hand he said, "I think art direction is a service. When the director needs you, you have to provide varieties of things for him to select." (C. Li 50) But on the other hand, he said, "I see filmmaking as a game and don't treat it too seriously. If a director gets too serious, I'll lose interest in no time." (Zhang et al. 40) He admitted that he was known for being stubborn and had dropped out of a film. He describes himself: "I'm not a practical person, naïve and idealistic even, but I give every film my best shot." (48) In response to the comment of Wong Kar Wai's filming style as "extravagant", he said, "I never ask him about production costs. I don't think it matters even if the film goes over-budget or you pay out of your own pocket so long as you have a film." (45)

William Chang emerged at a time when the industry was booming and transforming and thus allowed for a brief period for experimentation. He said, "When art directors first came onto the scene, directors didn't know how to deal with the situation. They gave you all the freedom as long as you got things done within budget. I'm used to this working style. I'm a man of few words, never attend meetings or tell people how I do things. Changes are the norm." (48) The industry was flexible enough to accommodate his absurd way of thinking. William Chang said he usually started his work with a feeling. It can be a texture or a shape. He said, "For instance, when I started working on

As Tears Go By, I demanded only two things that I absolutely needed. One was the white ceramic tile and the other one is a black round neck short sleeve knit top. I didn't know why. I just wanted these two things." (Y. Yan 62) "I can't explain. Each time I work on a film, something special will pop up in my mind, and the art design will develop from it naturally. Why? I don't know, but my experience proves it can't be wrong" (Zhang et al. 40) Wong Kar Wai's flexible way of working further indulged him. "Working with Wong (Kar Wai) I'm free to try almost anything," said William Chang quoting Brigitte Lin's birdcages in *Ashes of Time* as an example, "It may not be relevant to the plot but gave me the chance to try out new ideas." (48) William Chang shared Wong Kar Wai's habit of not letting others know what he was doing. He said, "When I worked with Wong Kar Wai, he had no idea what I wanted to do. But we understood each other and didn't have to verbalize it. He was easy going. I would try out something and then he would shoot some films to see the effect. Usually half way through the filming I still didn't know what I was doing or what I want." (Y. Yan 62) Director Wong Kar Wai is no more disciplined. William Chang described, "Unpredictability is our name. Wong (Kar Wai) would tell me to think up something only hours before shooting started, and I would tell him I would try. But it seems he has changed for the worse recently, making his requests at the eleventh hour…Maybe I have spoiled him." (Zhang et al. 49) They spoiled each other.

Nevertheless, they have some regularity. William Chang said, "Preparation and shooting go side-by-side…Wong (Kar Wai) knows how to use the art director's achievements. He sees it if he likes it, and ignores it if he doesn't." (48) In regard to his designs being abandoned William Chang said, "That's alright. I'll bring it up next time. I always put in more than is actually needed for him to choose. It's his film and I trust his taste to select the very best. That's the reason why Wong, Chris Doyle and I hit it off

well. They always know what's best and I respect their choices." (48) He thought of all the choices before making them available for their selection, "I offer only what I think is best, setting a boundary and limiting their selection, and mixing and matching within it." (48) William Chang, as production designer, set the parameters for the director and cinematographer to work within.

Like Wong Kar Wai, he also did his drafting on film. He said, "The world itself is full of color. I never set a color scheme for the movie. I'll wait till the filming is done about a week to know which color appears most frequently. Then I'll use that color; that might be the result of light, environment, street scene etc. I didn't purposely set the color scheme. Even if you set a color scheme, you may not be able to find it on the location. Besides, I don't like fixating on a color scheme." (C. Li 51) He also prefers to work within parameters naturally presented on the set. "I usually need to know what the scene is about and how it will be shot. It's only via the actor's acting, movement, camera position that I know how the character should look like. So I always have a hairstylist by my side. I only start the image design on the set. I don't like preparing it one month beforehand. I can't do it. If I am forced to prepare it one month or two weeks beforehand, I will fake it and make up something. And then when I'm on location, I will follow my feeling to work on it." (51) William Chang has his rationale for using elements naturally presented on the set. He said, "We will see what's available nearby. In fact, I always want to use the other people's used stuff as props. I don't like buying a new thing or creating a new thing. Because once it's bought or created, it loses the natural feeling it conveys." (52) It's natural that he likes the filmmaking style of *Chungking Express*. He said, "I like the improvisation approach in *Chungking Express*. It's leisurely. We don't start working until the last minute. For example, if we need a top, the call time is 6 and we'll start searching at 5. And when we get to the set, I suddenly found that the tea lady's top is

suitable and I'll borrow it. It's simple and we don't need to stress ourselves out." (52) By the mid-1990s William Cheung had worked in the industry for one and a half decades on over 50 films. His improvisation built on that experience. Despite his "disorderly" way of working, William Chang didn't create anxiety for the crew members. He said, "I like trying out luck. Sometimes I purposely did not plan anything and worked things out on the set. And I seldom exchange opinions with the crew. The crew members didn't worry because of that. If I didn't worry, why should they?" (52)

Wong Kar Wai, William Chang and Christopher Doyle were dubbed by the local media as "the magnificent trio" but they did not hang out 24/7 like other Hong Kong filmmakers. William Chang said, "We don't see ourselves as the 'magnificent trio'. We seldom see each other outside the set." (Zhang et al. 49) "We don't talk much, just concentrating on our own part. Any chemistry among us will be revealed during the shooting. They arrived on a set only after it has been constructed to discuss how the scene will be shot. I observe from the sidelines to see which angles they'll use more, and which less, though I never ask why. I look to the film for answers. This is the best way of getting things done. I dress a set and leave it to them to find the way to capture the most interesting images." (48) In fact, they kept some distance after production. William Chang said, "Because the entire process is so long, more than a year from pre-production to post-production, I need to go far away from him after each film and do something else." (49)

Wong Kar Wai's movies are often star-studded. William Chang played an important role as the star tamer. Jimmy Ngai in his journal of the making of *Ashes of Time* describes the tremendous difficulty being art director of this film with eight major stars who could add more chaos to Wong Kar Wai's already chaotic filmmaking (Ngai "Two or Three"). The stars, male or female, all wanted better wardrobes and images, and

desired not to be overshadowed by the others. Jimmy Ngai described that every time the actors tried out their costumes and makeup, it was like a military operation that had to be done discreetly to avoid each star seeing the other's costume. In my interview with him in August 2000, William Chang calmly recounted the endeavor. He said, Maggie Cheung, after putting on her costume, turned to him and asked, "What is Brigitte going to wear?" (Berenice) The interview was done shortly before *In the Mood for Love* was released and Maggie Cheung's cheongsam look became the center of attention. When William Chang and Brigitte Lin first met in 1981, Brigitte Lin was already a big star and the producer reminded him to watch what he said to her, but they became fast friends after the shoot. In the 1990s William Chang's name appeared on the credits of many of Brigitte Lin's films. William Chang explained, "She (Brigitte Lin) would press film companies to hire me for her films, so in the 1990s I was either art directing or designing her wardrobes and the images in all her films. It was a clause written into her contract, which meant extra expenses. Brigitte Lin is such a perfectionist that she won't even let a single hair be out of place or her mood would change, and that's why she only trusts people she knows well to design her wardrobe or do her hair or makeup." (Zhang et al. 38-39) But sometimes things didn't work out for William Chang. In 1995, there was rumor of Leon Lai (the killer in *Fallen Angel*) not getting along with him. Wong Kar Wai explained that William Chang wanted to transform Leon Lai's appearance into a completely different look, but Leon Lai was concerned about his image as an idol singer (X. Xu). In *Fallen Angel* Michell Reis, a former beauty queen usually cast in the nice girl role, played the killer's agent wearing fishnet stockings and fondling herself on his bed and became "the tackiest of super-slut characters." (Havis "Angels") In the beginning of the shooting, Wong Kar Wai asked the cameraman for an extra-wide-angle lens. The cameraman reminded him, "But that will make your actress look terrible." Wong Kar Wai replied, "Let's try it." In

an interview in Toronto the interviewer intuitively asked Wong Kar Wai, "Did you ask the actress first?" Wong Kar Wai answered, "No. I didn't have to." (Brunette 116) The stars' trust of William Chang's professionalism must have helped.

Christopher Doyle

Wong Kar Wai's films are known for their sensuous quality and visual expressivity. Christopher Doyle's cinematography helps the films speak to the audience at a more visceral level: a more physical, emotional, and sensual level. Doyle was born in 1952 in Sydney Australia. He worked as a sailor at age 18 and had traveled around the world. Picking up languages whereever he worked or lived, he is multilingual.[138] He described himself as "mischievous" (Cinnie) and his playfulness is in contrast to William Chang's calm and steady demeanor. He studied Chinese at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and his Chinese teacher gave him an elegant Chinese name "Du Kefeng" from a Chinese poem. His Chinese name sounds so authentically Chinese that Doyle said people didn't know that he's not Chinese when they only read his name.[139] In an interview in 1989 conducted in Chinese, the reporter was impressed and wrote in the introduction, "Du Kefeng, a very local and stylish Chinese name. He is unambiguously a foreigner, yet he speaks fluent Putonghua." (X. Wei 13) His integration into Chinese culture can be seen in his adoption of a special Chinese cinema aesthetic practice. In his journal on the production of *Happy Together* he wrote, "I don't know what to call our 'trademark' shots in English. In Chinese we say '*kong jing*'. They're not your conventional 'establishing shots' because they're about atmosphere and metaphor, not

space. The only thing they 'establish' is a mood or totally subjective point of view. They are clues to an 'ambient' world we want to suggest but not explain." (Doyle *Empty Shot*)

He later moved to Taiwan and worked on Taiwan's experimental film and government TV. When New Taiwan Cinema director Edward Yang invited him to shoot his first feature film *That Day on the Beach*, he had never used 35 mm film before and he said "I knew very little about lighting because I'd only shot some of my own stuff before, in available light" (Vasudev 23) Being able to keep things simple and use available light became his advantage when the situation required him to be flexible without compromising the quality, such as shooting in the desert in *Ashes of Time* or in his own apartment in *Chungking Express* (Zhou). He later moved to France, married a French-born Chinese woman, and experienced the life of many East Asian immigrant families of the era: splitting his time between his home base in the West and his workplace in the East. He lived in Paris but flew back and forth to make films in Hong Kong and Taiwan for three to four years. In the 1990s he worked mostly in art films or non-mainstream films with directors from Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. Despite his sailor background, Doyle didn't carry a sojourner's mentality. Instead, he made an effort to integrate into local life. In a 1989 interview he said, "Now I have to learn Cantonese. Even though the creative space in Hong Kong is not as wide as in Taiwan, it gives me more training in technical aspects. Therefore I choose to work in Hong Kong. I know there is a limitation. I will try hard to push myself forward within this limitation and reach a more ideal work environment…I need to learn to live. A person who knows how to live can be more creative and make better films." (X. Wei 13) In that 1989 interview in describing his

cooperation with Taiwan and Hong Kong directors and his production notes he explained how his thinking worked, “My way of thinking is similar to Chinese. I need to circle round and round before getting to the core of the question. It’s different from the foreigner’s linear way.” (12) By 1995 his identification with local film industry can be seen in his use of the world “we” and his comment on the local government’s approach to the industry. He said, “I think the biggest difference between Hong Kong and the world is we look down upon our own cinema…the Hong Kong government does not regard filmmaking as significant and doesn’t give any support. From their point of view, filmmakers are no different from prostitutes. Even the Hong Kong Film Awards was founded by the Film Bi-Weekly. This is impossible in other countries…Even Macau has a film bureau. Only the Hong Kong government didn’t do anything to recognize Hong Kong cinema.” (Gary "Doyle Post-Mtv" 57)

Despite his complaint about the government, it is easy to see why Doyle fitted well into the Hong Kong filmmakers’ personal and informal way of working. In a 1989 interview, He said, “When I work with other people, first of all I have to make sure if I’m familiar with him and if we can get along. This is very important to me.” (X. Wei 11) His emphasis on feeling foretold that he would click with William Chang and Wong Kar Wai. He said, “In the process of communicating with the director, I asked a lot of questions. The important thing is I want to know how the director feels about these incidents…I need to know what our relationship is and if the director shares my view.” (11)He described how Patrick Tam shared his view about cinematography. He said Patrick Tam agreed that Hong Kong movies at that time relied too much on dialogue to

tell stories. He said, "From my standpoint, we should tell stories with the structure, camera movement and its relationship with the actors…Patrick Tam is also bold to foreground the existence of the camera. Some people think that the camera should be transparent. This is one way of working. But more and more people feel that noticing the camera's existence is not necessarily a bad thing." (11) He concluded that looking for a work partner was more important than looking for a project. He could learn and improve himself via cooperating with others.

Like Wong Kar Wai's actors, Doyle experienced an epiphany during the filming of *Days of Being Wild*. He said, "I realized it's OK to just do your thing, do it as well as you can and it will work itself out. That happened in the middle of *Days of Being Wild*. Since then filmmaking for me has been very relaxed, it's been a sport. Before this it was an occupation, an aspiration. I was impossible on the set, I was uptight, I was over-serious, and now it is a game, relaxed, and quite an enjoyable process…Now what happens is we talk about music more than anything else. It's true that location and music are the most important elements. We have done six films together (up to *Happy Together*) and now there is such understanding. We have a common attitude of filmmaking and toward life. There is trust, there is faith, and from there we just go on." (Vasudev 24-25) Wong Kar Wai described his cooperation with Doyle as exciting. He said, "Doyle originally worked in Taiwan and participated in the birth of Taiwan New Cinema. His Chinese is very fluent. We have no communication problem. Besides, I don't treat him as a cameraman, but a partner at work. He also helps out in buying beer, subtitle and camera work…My cooperation with Doyle is exciting. This is because for

most cameramen, I need to push them to work, supervise them to get to my demand. But Doyle is always overdoing things, so that I have to hold him back." (Peng 44)

Doyle learned the importance of space from Wong Kar Wai. He said, "It (the space) has to be familiar, it has to say something to you, that when we go to look for a location whether it's in Argentina, or now in Shanghai…that the space actually informs the film.... We don't know the film until we find the space…once the actors have their hair, once they have the costumes, once they have a space to relate to…they feel more confident… So basically, the space actually informs the film, the space tells you this is a place where this kind of person could live." ("Meet Chris Doyle" "Meet Chris Doyle") The existing space is the starting point for Doyle's creative work. He said, "We spend a lot of time looking for spaces, doing location research. If you find a space that says something to you – to me that implies a certain kind of light, certain colors, and to the director it implies a certain kind of personality, a certain kind of person that would be in this space. That is actually how the character is developed…Basically it is very intuitive. We work off the implications of the space." (Vasudev 25) But in *Happy Together*, 50-60% of the film takes place in the small space of a room. Even the scene of a back alley looks like Hong Kong. The team was always asked why they travel all the way to Argentina to make a chamber drama. He said, "We went halfway round the world to discover that where you are is in your heart. In the film these two guys recreate a space of their own in an alien environment. Their world is really in their heart. People said we could have shot it in Hong Kong. And we said yes, but we didn't know that until we went

to Buenos Aires. I think a lot of people discover that when they immigrate, or travel. That was the great revelation of the film to us." (25)

The space in *Happy Together* is peculiar. In his production journal, Doyle described, "This film and its character are all out of Time and out of Space. In their world it's emotions that colour a context or a scene, not my gels or filters…" (Doyle "Out Of") "I light for 'neither here nor there'. We can wait till Post Production to decide if it's day or night!" (Doyle "Sun") In the paragraph titled "The Future" Doyle wrote, "Our interiors are consciously 'timeless', they're not 'logically' lit. Time of day is not a concern in this film. Tony and Leslie's world is out of space and time…Wong (Kar Wai) says that it's only as he edits the film that he finds the meaning of much of what we have shot. We didn't really know what certain details or colors or actions meant at the time. They anticipated where the film would take us. They were images from the future at that time that we've only just arrived at now."(Doyle "Future") To Doyle filmmaking in Wong Kar Wai's project is a journey rather than a destination.

Wong Kar Wai also led his actors in a journey of self-revelation. He capitalized on his stars' sense of vanity, insecurity, sensitivity, and emotional quality to develop his characters. He said, "I always look for people to talk with me. It's not that I need people to give me an opinion or suggestion. It is because I need to borrow their lives. When I know their views, I can model after their view and create a character. Sometime the call time is 7 am but at 4 am I will still be brainstorming with someone. That person may not know what I'm doing and doesn't know that I'm borrowing his life." (Ngai *Four Films* 172-73) Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung are his most frequently used stars. Their

characters show Wong Kar Wai's mastery of the star system in his commercially viable art films.

Maggie Cheung

Maggie Cheung played a fantastic dream girl in Wong Jing's romance comedy (e.g. *Romancing Star*). She was masculined up as a marginal woman surviving adversity in Tsui Hark's martial arts films (e.g. *Green Snake, Dragon Inn*). But in Wong Kar Wai's movie she became a melancholy and vulnerable woman who is romantically challenged. Maggie Cheung was born in Hong Kong and moved to England at age 8. Her parents speak Shanghaiese and she is multilingual. She worked as a TV commercial model by chance in her visit to Hong Kong at age 17. In 1983 she was the first runner-up in the Miss Hong Kong Pageant. When asked why she entered the beauty contest she said directly that it's vanity. She said, "Yes. I wanted to be a star (she didn't say 'actress'). I didn't have a detailed plan but thought that a beauty contest provided a shortcut. But I didn't want it so bad to get there by foul means. If I didn't win, I would just go back to England. It is no big deal." (Murong 39) Then she started in television and film. Her career was relatively stable with no major ups or downs. She used to be one of the most prolific actors in the 1980s. She gradually transformed her image as a beauty queen into that of a serious actress. She always got into conflict with the local media who called her "the lovelorn movie queen" and depicted her as arrogant and uncooperative. Despite her returning to Hong Kong for more than 10 years, she was still a square peg in a round hole, not fitting into the existing informal way of operation of the entertainment news media in this Chinese society. In a 1995 interview, Maggie Cheung insisted on keeping

her personal life private. She said, "I think the system of Hong Kong media is problematic. The reporters don't follow the procedure of arranged interview and still prefer to do it the personal way and then make things up in their writing…You shouldn't say that I hate the media because I don't want to meet people. When I don't have something to say or I don't think I can lead an interesting conversation, I prefer to be left alone. I live an ordinary person's life when I'm not making movies or doing publicity." (J. Lau) She explicitly said she preferred to act in art films that gave her greater sense of satisfaction whereas directors of commercial film often rushed her. She said, "Like in *Days of Being Wild*, many people say the tempo is too slow. But this is real life. This is acting with life experience. So I enjoy working in this kind of film." (Jin 37) Nonetheless she did not oppose commercial cinema. She said, "I absolutely do not discriminate commercial films. And we shouldn't. They are just a different type of films." (J. Lau 48) She described Wong Kar Wai as an actor's director. She said, "I enjoy working with Wong Kar Wai because as an actor I can work out things with him. He gave actors a lot of creative space. He didn't mind using a lot of time and film until you get a perfect result." (48) Getting recognized is another source of satisfaction. She said, "That is why actors in Wong Kar Wai's films always got nominated for awards. He is absolutely a director who makes movies for the actors." (Jin 37) In 1993 Maggie Cheung revealed that at that point she was tired of making frivolous movies and wanted to be more selective in her future projects. Otherwise she would hate acting. She acknowledged that *As Tears Go By* was a major turning point in her career and Wong Kar Wai enlightened her on acting (J. Lau). She said, "Before *As Tears Go By*, I struggled a lot. I want people to praise my

acting…the movies I made before *As Tears Go By* are failures…that might be because I didn't stop and do some introspection and think how to improve myself." (Murong 39) She said she liked to leave things to fate and believed in luck.

Tony Leung

Tony Leung is also a private person and went through the point of wanting to quit. His career was also relatively stable with no major ups or downs. He attended the TVB actors training class in 1982. Despite his quiet outlook, he stood out in the crowd for playing an introspective introvert side-character so well that the TV producers added more scenes for him. From his first film *Young Cops* (Yau, Kar-hung, 1985) to *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar Wai, 2000) he has acted in about 51 movies, including Taiwan director Hou Hsiao Hsien's *City of Sadness* (1989), Vietnamese-French director Tran Anh Hung's *Cyclo* (1995), and for Hong Kong directors like John Woo, Tsui Hark, Stanley Kwan, Peter Chan, as well as in many less than quality movies. Tony Leung had said Maggie Cheung was like his alter ego. He was also sensitive and serious about his acting in an era when overbooking and the unprofessionalism of stars was common. For example, Wong Kar Wai asked him to play in the sequel of *Days of Being Wild*, but he already promised Tsui Hark to play the monk in *A Chinese Ghost Story III*. He insisted on authenticity of the body form and shaved his head to play the monk. He refused to put on a wig to play the gambler. He said, "I will not play in the sequel until my hair grows back. It is because I won't believe myself being a gambler. We have never seen a bald gambler. Body form is very important in acting." (C. Feng) He was insecure and emotional even when he worked with directors like Hou Hsiao-hsien and John Woo. He

played a mute character in Hou's *City of Sadness*. Instead of seeing this as an assurance of his performance, he suspected that it was based on a commercial calculation, and that the investor wanted a Hong Kong star to help sell the movie overseas (C. Feng). He got emotional after seeing his performance in *Bullet in the Head* (John Woo, 1990). He said, "I locked myself up for 7 days and cried at least 3 days." (17) It was Wong Kar Wai who rebuilt his confidence. He said, "In Hong Kong's environment it is hard for actors to improve their acting. We have to work 7 to 8 or even 10 years in order to make a little progress. I can't learn much from the one-year training class at TVB. After that there was no one to guide me…I couldn't work better. I felt bored. Even though I have only one shot in *Days of Being Wild*, but it rebuilt my confidence." (17) In a 1994 interview article titled "Tony Leung is a melancholic boy" he was described as melancholic, unapproachable and unpredictable (H. Huang "Tony Leung Melancholic"). The winning of the best actor award for the first time for *Chungking Express* didn't help him feel better about himself. He said, "In filming *Chungking Express* I didn't do any preparation or character study. I just improvised on the set. It was like playing at work. It was so easy that I didn't feel like I contributed anything. Now that I got the award, I feel anxious." (Gary "Tony Leung Fulfills" 39) Tony Leung was one of the few actors in that era who would spend a tremendous amount of time doing research and reading books. His effort showed in the roles in which he was cast: he often played the intellectual type: a quiet introvert with complicated feelings. He admitted that in real life he was also emotional, "I can suddenly feel unhappy and depressed. It has nothing to do with something or someone…but sometimes I will suddenly become very happy." (C. Liu 42) In 2000 after

he won best actor at Cannes, Tony Leung revealed to a magazine the impact on him growing up in a single parent family, how he became quiet, have difficulties communicating with others and his longing for a harmonious family. He said, “I really don’t like talking. I only like listening to others…it’s the influence of my family since childhood. I used to be feisty and happy. But at age 8 to 9 years old after father left the family, my childhood became defective…I became quiet and kept a distance from others.” (M. Wang 68) He maintained a stable and close relationship with his mother and girlfriend, but he was described as uptight. He said, “After working together all these years, Wong Kar Wai still feels that he can’t push down the wall in my heart.” (C. Wong "Tony Leung – Everything Is About Feeling" 20) He went through a self-destructive period. He used drinking to help his emotional pain. He said, “I drank a lot to escape from the pain of hiding a lot of secrets. Later I found out that acting can help me let my emotions out. I can cry my heart out without feeling inferior or embarrassed.” ("Tony Leung – Everything Is About Feeling" 37) Wong Kar Wai integrated Tony Leung’s attributes (quiet, introspective, insecure, self-destructive, has difficulty in communication, yearns for home and a stable relationship) into his character and made the filming process a personal journey for him. Carina Lau was complimented for her performance in *Days of Being Wild*. Wong Kar Wai talked to her and helped her to play the scene where she swallowed her pride and went back to the man. She said, “I now realized that Wong Kar Wai knows me better than I do. I will say I won’t go back to the man but my actions will be otherwise. I was not familiar with Wong Kar Wai before. But during the filming, he kept chatting with me during the break. He accomplished this

within such a short time. I'm very impressed." (Le "No Longer") Carina Lau also mentioned the 46 NG takes that Wong Kar Wai used to "naturalize" his star's established pattern of acting. Tony Leung also got more than 20 NG takes and yet he was grateful. He said, "He (Wong) spent 400,000 feet of film and 300,000 feet of it was for me to practice acting…in the process the character gradually gets in shape. This is easier than giving me a script, study it for a month and then transform myself into the character from this abstract description." (C. Wong "One Cannes Best Actor and Three International Auteur Directors" 32) In working with Wong Kar Wai, actors gained knowledge in acting, or in themselves and that probably made Wong Kar Wai attractive to actors who needed career therapy or self-introspection.

WONG KAR WAI'S FILMMAKING

Despite the chaotic way they worked and their perfectionist personalities, Wong Kar Wai's collaborators remained calm, supportive and maintained their zeal in filmmaking. William Chang, when asked if he thought of working as a director, said, "I was an art director from day one and got stuck with it…I think the most important quality of a director is that he/she has something to say. I lost my desire to express my thoughts when I reached my thirties. Being a screenwriter and a director is too tough these days." (Zhang et al. 49) Christopher Doyle admitted that he tended to load his own film with his message and could better express himself in light and color (X. Wei). Among them Wong Kar Wai was the one who has something to say and was trained to say it well. He said, "The reason I went into filmmaking had more to do with geography than anything else. I was born in Shanghai, but my parents moved to Hong Kong when I was five years old. People in Hong Kong don't speak the same dialect as people in Shanghai, so I was not

able to talk with people there; I couldn't make any friends. And my mother, who was in the same situation, often took me to the movies because it was something that could be understood beyond words. It was a universal language based on images. Like a lot of people in my generation, therefore, I discovered the world through films and later on through TV. Twenty years earlier, I might have chosen to express myself through songs. Fifty years earlier, it might have been books. But I grew up with images, and it felt rather natural for me to go and study visuals." (Tirard 194) But Wong Kar Wai admitted that he has no ulterior goal in filmmaking, "Filmmaking is a job to me. But other than that, the biggest fun of filmmaking is I can live a few lives. I can create a world and arrange how the characters live their lives. It's like playing God. I can get inside the characters and experience their lives." (Yang and Liu 46) Nevertheless, he does not take film too seriously. He said, "I remember I joked with Patrick Tam. I asked him which films he would bring with him if his house were on fire. People's lists of favorite films always change. It's only at that moment you know which films are most important to you. But in the end you might rather take the passport than those videos and laser discs. It is because in the end we can do without film." (46) Unlike Wong Jing, Tsui Hark and many Hong Kong filmmakers to whom quitting filmmaking is not an option, Wong Kar Wai, when asked what he would do if he didn't make movies, replied, "I will open a bar and be a bartender, or the breakfast manager of a restaurant." (J. Pan A21) He was not thinking of eternal fame or laying the foundation for a future enterprise. In a conversation with his friend Jimmy Ngai in 1995, Wong Kar Wai predicted that his popularity wouldn't last for long (Ngai *Four Films*). From Jimmy Ngai's point of view, Wong Kar Wai was so familiar with the existing system that he was able to break out from it and establish something new. But Wong Kar Wai described that his career path was more like getting into a battle while moving on and thinking of the next move at the same time. Wong Kar

Wai said, “All I could think of is how to save myself…I can only care about staying alive in the messy battle. I never thought of winning a beautiful war…I just want to keep working when there is still opportunity.” (*Four Films* 165) Jimmy Ngai was correct that Wong Kar Wai was insightful of the game in the Hong Kong film industry. Wong Kar Wai pointed out the most essential skill in surviving the Hong Kong film industry: telling a story. Ng See Yuen, chairman of the Federation of Hong Kong Filmmakers and Honorary Permanent President of the Hong Kong Film Directors' Guild, once said, “If you cannot tell an attractive story in one minute, then forget about it…a good script is only the basic requirement. I don’t need a good script. What can you give me besides a good script? You need to present something that catches the audience’s attention. If you can find that point, then go ahead and shoot the film. Otherwise just save your breath. There are already a few thousand Chinese films in existence. Yours won’t make a difference in this ocean, right?” (W. He "Ng Business Slow" 54) It is also important to sell the story to the star. Tony Leung explained why he kept working with Wong Kar Wai, “Wong Kar Wai is excellent in telling a story. Every time after listening to his story I would feel, ‘Oh! I will regret it if I don’t work in his film! It will be a big loss!’…I think a good director should be good at telling a story. A story coming from Wong Kar Wai’s mouth is particularly attractive.” (C. Wong "One Cannes Best Actor and Three International Auteur Directors" 133) In his speech for best actor award for *Happy Together* at the Hong Kong Film Awards, Tony Leung said, “Thank you to Wong Kar Wai who used a fake script to lure me to leave Hong Kong and go to Argentina. I couldn’t get back to Hong Kong and had to finish the film with him.” In response to a question about what he would teach in a screenwriting class, Wong Kar Wai took the pragmatic perspective and said, “A lot of people think that a screenwriter is someone who sits there and writes. No, this is not true. First of all, you must be excellent in story-telling

because you depend on this skill to sell your story. Those distinctive writers that I know do not spend much time writing. Instead they spend a lot of time talking. You have to tell your story clearly. Some screenwriters like to ask people to let him go home and write and explained that what he writes will be different. But the problem is such difference may not be relevant. This type of screenwriter usually does not have high success rate…success rate means the level of their popularity. What a successful screenwriter wrote may not be good but what he tells is very good. He can lead you to envision a picture. Whether his material can be used is another matter. But at least it is fun. That guy may have cheated you to pay for his meal by giving material not useful to you. But the material is entertaining." (Ngai *Four Films* 159) Wong Kar Wai pays a lot of attention to people and is an industry-savvy writer. He said, "When you first start as a screenwriter, you might have a lot of questions. But once you understand this industry more, you will understand why this person thinks this way and that person thinks that way. You will observe more and more and understand how the industry works. You will know more about distribution. You will understand the interpersonal relationship…then you will not ask questions like this one, "This idea is not bad. Why didn't he use it?' By then, you will no longer feel vexed. You start to understand why things happen in certain way. You understand people's mentality better." (*Four Films* 158) He was aware of the dominant role of distribution in shaping the game of Hong Kong cinema and his films all have the apparent façade of a genre, such as gangster, martial arts, romance, comedy, etc. Wong Kar Wai said, "Now everybody says we don't have good scripts. How can there be good scripts?...Who dares to try out new things? We all depend on the distributors who dictate the genres to us…It is a business calculation behind everything…The characteristic of Hong Kong cinema is: the movies are made for export. Most films are independent productions. That means we have to sell the rights in overseas markets before shooting.

And the index for overseas selling are firstly cast and secondly types of film. Everybody follows the same proven films. That means there will be a lot of similar films in the market at the same time." (*Four Films* 161-63) But Wong Kar Wai's *As Tears Go By*, with Maggie Cheung and Andy Lau, two of the most prolific actors of the year and at the peak of gangster film era, stood out in the crowd.

In that year there was an extra theatre chain to provide more outlets for independent productions. Wong Kar Wai described that his first film, made in 1988, was produced at "the golden time in Hong Kong cinema. In that year, there were a lot of new filmmakers becoming directors because we were producing three hundred films a year in Hong Kong. In those days Hong Kong films were financed by pre-selling the film to the traditional market, that is, the Asian market. The producer needed only a story, a genre, and the name of the cast." (Brunette 126-27) Maggie Cheung has said *As Tears Go By* was a mind-opener and made her a better actress. William Chang described, "She (Maggie Cheung) didn't want to take the role but had to because of a contractual obligation. But she was soon working with the same level of enthusiasm as we were." (Zhang et al. 40) *As Tears Go By* proved Wong Kar Wai's ability to survive as a director, mastering the genre and star system in the commercial system of Hong Kong cinema (even though he had been fired as a writer by a major film company only a year before). The multiple nominations, awards and the stars' word of mouth of Wong Kar Wai's special directing caught the industry insiders' attention and heightened expectations for his next project.

Wong Kar Wai's second film *Days of Being Wild* (1990) was much more personal, and drastically different from mainstream Hong Kong films. The production created a media buzz, not yet a common phenomenon back then and not expected and capitalized upon by Wong Kar Wai. In a report on the production, a writer described how

supportive the investor Alan Tang was, "The boss Alan Tang put aside all other business and went with the crew (to the Philippines) to do preparation work for *Days of Being Wild*. Alan Tang's contribution went beyond financial support. Wong Kar Wai thought Alan Tang put a lot of heart in *Days of Being Wild*. He was there not just for making a profit but also wanted to make a good movie. Wong Kar Wai said he must give him a credit." (Tian 36) With six top stars and taking two years to finish (unusually long by Hong Kong standards back then), *Days of Being Wild* turned out to be a box office fiasco and was widely reported so. In 2004 William Chang described what went wrong in the process, "(*Days of Being Wild* is) certainly more personal and closer to his heart. *As Tears Go By* did well in the box office. We did emphasize the commercial values of *Days of Being Wild* but they somehow evaporated as shooting went on. Perhaps the boss thought we wouldn't mess up with all the big names in the cast. We didn't go to the extremes for the sake of it. The story dictates how things should be done. If forced to, we can make our films more commercial. But given a choice, it's only natural I'd do it my way." (Zhang et al. 40-41)

The local film magazine City Entertainment (aka Film Bi-Weekly), circulated mainly among industry insiders and film buffs, covered *Days of Being Wild* from its production, to release, to its being cut from theaters, to it winning multiple Hong Kong films awards over a course of 10 issues (from issue 305 to issue 315 i.e. covering from Dec 6, 1990 to May 15 1991). Such extensive coverage had never happened before or after to other films. On issue 308 after the film was released there were interviews of 19 filmmakers and film critics about their views on the film. The interviewees included directors John Woo, Tsui Hark, Stanley Kwan, Alfred Cheung, Hong Kong international film festival programmer Li Cheuk-to, Wong Ain-ling and Law Kar, critics like Leong Noong-kong, Freddie Wong and Shu Kei, etc. (Anonymous "Days Of") Such attention

was unprecedented for a new director for his second film. At the 10th Hong Kong Film Awards it had 9 nominations and won 5. With Christopher Doyle winning the best cinematography, Agfa film also used the opportunity to put ads in the magazine to congratulate the production team. With such overwhelming media attention, fellow directors' enthusiastic complements, actors' expectations of his Midas touch in his next project, it's hard to imagine that Wong Kar Wai could go back to a modest project like his first film that maintained a balance between art and commerce. This was Wong Kar Wai's first point of no return as a director. There was a report that Wong Kar Wai reedited the film for a foreign film festival (Anonymous "Wong Kar Wai Reedit").

In an industry concerned with instant success and short term profit, it was to the industry outsiders' surprise that Wong Kar Wai got financing for his next project *Ashes of Time*, which is *Days of Being Wild* transposed from the desolate urban setting, to a desolated desert with the characters in costume, also with Leslie Cheung as the central character with others revolving around him. Years later Wong Kar Wai explained how such aberrant projects attracted investors, "From the investor's point of view, *Days of Being Wild* is a very attractive object. *Ashes of Time* is also very attractive. With such a title and such a cast list…Every investor wants to see if there is the color of money…It's hard to predict whether it will win or lose, but it's worth the bet. Even for me in the position of director, there are a lot of uncertainties. Sometime you'll find the project plain without much excitement. But there are some elements that let you know that it will be very exciting. I think for most projects we cannot tell if it will make profit or not. It's like gambling." (Ngai *Four Films* 167) The Chinese title of *Days of Being Wild* ("*The True Story of a Teddy Boy*" see table 8.1) is the same as the translated Chinese title of *Rebel without a Cause*, (Nicholas Ray, 1955) starring James Dean. The Chinese title of *Ashes of Time* is *The East Evil and The West Poison*, names of the characters in Louis Cha's Eagle

Shooting Heroes, a classic and popular martial arts novel translated into multiple languages. *Ashes of Time* is a creative adaptation of the novel imagining the heroes' lives when they were young. Obviously besides the impressive cast list, Wong Kar Wai's pitching skill must have played a role in attracting the cast and financiers. Again, with 8 stars and protracted shooting the production of *Ashes of Time* became talk of the town.

Local film critics were enthusiastic about Wong Kar Wai's daring projects but local audiences were not. The followers in the domestic market were far too few to support Wong Kar Wai's production. Local film awards and critics' support was not translated into material backing. Back then Wong Kar Wai had to defend against his film being labeled as art film. In a 1994 interview he said, "I don't agree with people calling my films art films. There is always the art of film. There is no art film. If only I can find my position, this is a good thing…I always emphasize finding a space. I have to figure out how many audience followers I have and work out a budget. I will make films I like within that budget. I don't have to force myself into doing things I don't like…My wish is to finish the film within budget and have the audience who accepts me find the film okay. I keep testing the market until one day everyone knows what Wong Kar Wai's film is like. By then people won't oppose my film. They know I make this type of film and accept it. That way I feel less pressure. No one loses. This is the best scenario. " (Yang and Liu 46) On another occasion Wong Kar Wai went further to say there was no such thing as art film in Hong Kong. He said, "Don't regard yourself as making art. You have to see yourself as a craftsman. There is basically no art film in Hong Kong. The overall environment is not encouraging for the existence of art film. Right now *wenyi* (roughly meaning drama or melodrama) is in. But it just means a successful commercial product sale." (J. Pan A21) Wong Kar Wai was conscious of branding his films and building himself as a typed director, but not necessarily as an art film director just yet.

At a time when Chinese films from Taiwan and China were criticized for being made for film festivals and neglecting the domestic audience, *Ashes of Time* was planned to be sent to the Venice film festival. In response to the accusation that he was making a film for the festival and for gaining awards, Wong Kar Wai replied, "It is the boss's plan to attend the film festival because it can help make money. In fact, there is another advantage of attending a film festival. It can help open up more overseas markets so that we don't have to be led and tied up by a few markets." (A21) Wong Kar Wai still had to defend himself and prove that he was money conscious. Wong Kar Wai's good friend Jeff Lau in a 1994 interview also defended him, but not by denying his films were art films. Jeff Lau's thinking was ahead of his peers. Instead of framing the issue as balancing art and commerce, he was thinking of commercially viable art film. He said, "Wong Kar Wai in fact is the most commercial director. Don't you know that the name 'Wong Kar Wai' is valuable in France and his income is counted in US dollars?" (H. Huang "Jeff Lau" 28) He went on to quote the examples of other money-making Chinese art film directors like Ang Lee, Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige and Hou Hsiao-Hsien and said, "Films with their names sell at a good price. They won international awards and have international fame. Buyers in Europe and the U.S. are going after their films. The film owners actually make a lot of profit." ("Jeff Lau" 28) Tony Rayns in 1981 already wrote about opening up the international market for Hong Kong cinema in a new way (Rayns "From Father and Son to Be the Key for Opening up International Market"). He reported the screening of 6 Hong Kong films (mostly Hong Kong New Wave directors' films) in the South-East Asian Panorama of the Berlin Film Festival, and called the film critics' attention to Ann Hui's *The Spooky Bunch* and Allen Fong's *Father and Son* in the Edinburgh and London film festivals. Tony Rayns points out that film critics there liken *Father and Son* to French, American and Soviet cinemas and that was unprecedented.

Rayns was optimistic that Western film critics' recognition of Hong Kong new cinema would help expand the international markets for the Hong Kong film industry beyond King Hu's exotic martial arts genre and mass-produced kung fu flicks. So the next step for Wong Kar Wai was to expand his overseas market by getting recognition in Western markets. *Ashes of Time* won the 51st Venice Film Festival Ozella D'oro prize. This was another point of no return for Wong Kar Wai: the international film festival award. If he wanted more creative autonomy he needed to diversify his markets and not be led by a few. Therefore he did not confine himself to traditional markets in Asia. And if he didn't want to be pigeonholed in the exotic martial arts genre in film festivals, he needed something modern and urban.

With the track record of losing big for two films in a row, it is hard to imagine Wong Kar Wai could still use the old system, the existing pool of investors in Asia and rely on the old markets. After *Ashes of Time*, perhaps to give himself more administrative autonomy, Wong Kar Wai set up his own production company and worked as his own producer. During the postproduction of *Ashes of Time* he directed *Chungking Express*, an absurd but light-hearted funny short piece starring Faye Wong, the diva in the Asian market but with no film acting experience. This time Wong Kar Wai made a profit but was criticized by local media for being selfish and not considerate of his investors, because it took him two years to shoot *Ashes of Time,* but for a film he invested in with his own money, he finished it in only two months (Anonymous "Do It Slow"). Wong Kar Wai explained this must be because of others' prejudices toward him, because he also made *As Tears Go By* quickly, and it made a profit but no one mentioned it. *Chunking Express* sold well in Japan, France and South Korea (Xiuhui Yang) and Quentin Tarantino would distribute it in the U.S. market. After winning awards at the Hong Kong Film Awards for *Chungking Express*, Wong Kar Wai was asked again by local media on

how he maintained a balance between art and commerce. This time Wong Kar Wai answered differently, “First of all I want everyone to know that a lot of people dichotomize art and commercial films, assuming that the two cannot be integrated. But now if you look at many good movies, you will find that art and commercial films are not incompatible and in conflict with each other. The path that I’m walking now is to provide a particular type of film in the film market.” (Gary "Wong Film Awards" 36) Wong Kar Wai was consolidating his type by making a sort of sequel to *Chungking Express,* and made it more accessible to more audience.

Fallen Angel, described by Doyle as the most accessible of Wong Kar Wai’s work up to that point, was shown in the Toronto International Film Festival. In response to comments about absurdism and dystopian vision of the world in his films, Wong Kar Wai described the production of *Chungking Express* after the grueling process of filming *Ashes of Time*. He wanted to make a film like making a student film, simple and straightforward. He had a two-month time slot and didn’t have a script. He said, “So I just started shooting this film in chronological order. And I sat in the coffee shop writing during the day, and then the shooting at night. We didn’t have any permits, we didn’t have any setups; we just went to places we already knew well. We worked like hell, like thieves, and it was fun. So the working style already dominated the look of the film.” (Brunette 116) *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angel* entered the international market with an urban motif that Asian and Western cities dwellers could relate to. But as a writer described, in Hong Kong “Wong Kar Wai”, just as Wong Kar Wai himself described, became an object of debate with no middle ground or objective review. But the writer was optimistic that Wong Kar Wai would not be like the directors of Taiwan New Cinema who had to depend on reputations gained in the international film festivals in order to find a space in the domestic market. She thought Wong Kar Wai could carve out

a different path (Xiuhui Yang). By mid-1995, Wong Kar Wai's previous four films were shown in art theaters in Europe and the U.S. His movies were catering not only to Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia. In the press conference in Hong Kong, Wong Kar Wai said *Fallen Angel* would not attend a European film festival because the Western audience only categorized Hong Kong cinema as Chinese cinema. He thought Hong Kong cinema did not have to walk that path. He said, "The attraction of Hong Kong cinema is its energy. The revelation of the European and American market is that we don't have to make kung fu movies. We have more options." (Z. Shan) As a non-action film director, Wong Kar Wai had to find his own path and explore new markets for his type of films.

In a 1995 interview by the local film magazine City Entertainment, he put forward the concept of the supermarket. He said, "I think these people's conception of commercialism is too narrowly defined. I want to make clear that filmmaking is a commercial act. There should be different packaging and types of customers. It should be like a supermarket that can accommodate different business practices and different products." (Mai "Double Wongs" 25) In 1995 he grew more conscious of the importance of building up his brand and image in order to consolidate his niche space in this supermarket. He said, "If I want to make personal films, I should find a space for survival. This is especially so in the past few years. I feel stronger and stronger the need to let people know that I will only make this type of film and not other types. If you like them, I welcome your business. If you don't give me business, it's also okay. I feel that if I have to cater to overseas markets, I can't please everyone and I can't do things I want to do." ("Double Wongs" 27) Wong Kar Wai realized the paradox of surviving in a commercial system: instead of presenting himself as a multifaceted director, he had to narrow down the range of his projects and typecast himself in order to negotiate for

creative autonomy. In mid-1995, Hong Kong cinema was at its ebb. Wong Jing and Wong Kar Wai were often posed as the two extremes of Hong Kong cinema. Wong Jing was blamed for bringing down the Hong Kong film industry with his low quality films, and Wong Kar Wai was put on a pedestal. To consolidate his image and film type, next he had to be consecrated as an auteur by a major European film festival. At the premier of *Fallen Angel* in Hong Kong, Wong Kar Wai hoped that Hong Kong cinema would recover in two years. He predicted that there would be some revival before 1997 because the Hong Kong 1997 issue was a concern in the world (Fan). In 1997, he brought his film to international attention at Cannes.

A few days before the announcement of the results, in a media meeting in Cannes, Wong Kar Wai admitted that in drafting the story of *Happy Together* he had thought of relating the story to 1997 (J. Huang). He said, "In the beginning of the writing, I did think of the protagonists' background related to 1997. In *Happy Together*, one character did go to Argentina because of the 1997 issue…when I started I had thought of expressing my view on 1997. But as the filming went on, the feeling faded…the two protagonists went back to Hong Kong in the end…whether this film is still related to 1997 is up to your interpretation. I didn't purposely make it that way." (C5) That might be true. Back in 1994 July, before his films were released in the West, in a local media interview Wong Kar Wai had said, "I don't like talking about politics because politics can expire. Your view today will be different from that of tomorrow. I would rather focus on human feeling and relationships." (J. Pan A21) However, in an interview after the announcement of the result in Cannes, Wong Kar Wai brought up the 1997 issue to the reporter of a Hong Kong English newspaper. He said, "This award has special meaning to us in 1997; I hope we can work in the same way in the future and make the kind of films we want to make…I hope somehow it means Hong Kong people can work happily together…If you

really believe in something and you want to do it, make the film – legally or illegally." (Halligan) He added, "There are new rules in China now where you have to submit a script and it has to be identical to the completed film. As everybody knows, I never have a script…But I am not afraid. If Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou can still make films, why can't I?" (Halligan) It is hard for the Western media not to find a political reading in his film. The newspaper writer described the Cannes's tradition "as a star-studded event which nonetheless awards the anonymous and uncommercial." (Dai) She also mentioned Wong Kar Wai strode onto the stage to receive his prize while wearing his trademark sunglasses and reported him saying that he "only removed his sunglasses in bed." (Dai) But in the Hong Kong Chinese media, it was not hard to find a picture of him not wearing sunglasses and not in bed. In 2000 *In the Mood for Love* won more than a dozen international awards and Wong Kar Wai was no longer asked how he balanced art and commerce. The Maggie Cheung character was a cheongsam-wearing repressed Chinese woman. But the parade of her outfits (23 cheongsams in a 98 minute film) and the art direction were so excessive that it felt more like self-mockery than selling out to the West. The cheongsam became a talking point that, as usual for Wong Kar Wai's films, was subsequently parodied by fellow Hong Kong filmmakers.[140] In the end, Wong Kar Wai had proved his supermarket theory: he was producing a commercially viable art film for Hong Kong and for the international markets.

WONG KAR WAI'S STORY: ORPHAN ISLAND VANITY

The very first shot of Wong Kar Wai's first film is a blank video wall. Wong Kar Wai's oeuvre revolves around this theme: vanity, the illusive nature of a movie. In Chinese language cinema it is called "electric shadow". It's a shadow play, a reconstruction rather than a re-presentation of reality. Wong Kar Wai's Hong Kong story is about the illusive nature of the representation of Hong Kong. His characters are often

glamorous on the outside, but feel insecure and empty on the inside. They are ordinary people, delusional in their freedom and oblivious to their captivity. Not only are they mostly orphans with no family ties, their homes are either imaginary or unreliable like a rootless tree. They are more connected by a shared experience of loneliness than by affective bonding. Wong Kar Wai adopted an extreme style to convey the falsehood and hollowness in their lives.

As Tears Go By was made in 1988. The producer thought it was safe for Wong Kar to make a gangster film. Wong Kar Wai said, "But by that time, we already had more than two hundred gangster films, and they were at their peak." MTV was popular then. Wong Kar Wai thought of borrowing the form of MTV to make a gangster film and went beyond that, "…because gangster films are so vague, everything seems fake. Everybody has already said the same thing, and I didn't think people would believe it any more. So I was trying to do it with the form of MTV, which just made it more fake, you know. You don't have the feeling that I'm trying to tell you a really serious story." The interviewer Peter Brunette responded, "Right. So it gets so fake, so totally artificial that a core of truth kind of comes out after all. A core of reality." (Brunette 119-20) And Wong Kar Wai agreed with his inference. In the story, gangster Tony cares more about face and dignity than making money. He is played by Alex Man, an actor known for his expressive acting style. Fly (Jacky Cheung) is delusional about being somebody one day and feels embarrassed to let Tony see him working as a street peddler. Jacky Cheung and Alex Man's over the top acting styles are in contrast with Maggie Cheung and Andy Lau's subtle performances. In *Days of Being Wild* and *Ashes of Time* Jacky Cheung's acting style is completely toned down. There is also a subtle humorous moment to foreground the artificiality of the film world. Before Wah looked for Fly in his home, Wah and Fly were badly beaten by the gangsters. They have bruises and cuts and their

eyes and faces were all swollen. But in the next shot, they are all cleaned up with matching white colored band aids on their foreheads, while they are talking seriously about the death risk of their next job and how Wah took settlement money (a reparation for the family if he dies on the job) at age of 14. The conversation topic is serious but the visual suggests a comedy. Since this film, Wong Kar Wai's characters always long for a home but are disillusioned. Wah (Andy Lau)'s home, with its minimal furnishings, was more like a temporary hideout than a home that could accommodate his new woman. Ngo (Maggie Cheung) works as a waitress in a hotel in Lantau Island, an outlying island with no frequent transport connection then. Fly came from Rennie's Mill (its English name is changed to Tiu Keng Lan after 1997), a place which used to be called "the Little Taiwan": a temporary settlement area for retreated KMT soldiers who couldn't go to Taiwan in 1949. Fly's mother remarried and he doesn't get along with his stepfather. The three long for a home, but remain homeless in this city.

In a review of *Days of Being Wild* Jimmy Ngai listed all the dialogues that mentioned the word "home". He wrote: "In *Days of Being Wild*, considering the scarcity of dialogues and the high frequency of the mentioning of 'home', we can almost jump to the conclusion that Wong Kar Wai is obsessed with 'home'" (Ngai "Romance" 109) The protagonist Yuddy (Leslie Cheung)'s home, with the bed as the only prominent piece of furniture, is a rented place which is more a den for luring girls than a home. He has the illusion of himself being free like a bird and dumped two women. He thought of himself as self-sufficient but in fact is the most emotionally needy. He is abandoned twice by his birth mother and his foster mother. He thinks he can fly to a faraway place. In fact he only flies back to his birthplace in the Philippines and dies. His birth mother is a Philippine woman. He is not even a pure Chinese in this Chinese dialect-speaking (Cantonese and Shanghaiese) community.

In *Ashes of Time*, Ou-yang Fang (also played by Leslie Cheung)'s home is a shack in a desolate desert. The romantic world-travelling martial arts heroes from Louis Cha's novel are dressed more like the homeless than kung fu masters. In *Chungking Express*, Cop 633 (Tony Leung)'s home, located next to a public elevator, is flooded. The Faye Wong character has sneaked into his home to recreate a space of her own. Cop 233 (Takeshi Kaneshiro) never sits on a chair for dining like at a real home. In *Fallen Angel*, the killer (Leon Lai)'s home is a seedy balcony-like room next to the mass transit railway. His getaway vehicle is a public mini-bus where he runs into an old school friend. The killer is disillusioned and wants to give up the life of the gun. Wong Kar Wai explained the use of wide angle lens throughout the film, "…the twisted faces (a result of shooting close up with a wide-angle lens) showed the psychology of the characters, their insecurity." (Halligan) The mute (Takeshi Kaneshiro), sneaking into other people's shops to recreate his business, also longs for appreciation and a place of his own. In *Happy Together* the gay couple flies all the way to Argentina, and recreates a space of their own in an alien environment. In *In the Mood for Love* the few families are all cramped into adjacent apartments and lived unhappily together. The landlady smells something and lectures So Lai-chun (Mrs. Chan) to discipline herself. In the ending, the male protagonist Chow Mo-wan told his secret in a hole of a big tree, as if the tree won't betray his secret like his gossipy neighbors. None of Wong Kar Wia's characters' homes provided emotional security like a deep-rooted tree. These people are all emotionally homeless.

Wong Kar Wai's characters are not free as birds in the age of a borderless world either. In *As Tears Go By*, Wah comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. He has no family ties and can't form one. In *Days of Being Wild*, Yuddy came from the Philippines and dies there. He doesn't get anywhere. In *Ashes of Time*, Ou-Yang Feng comes from a place call Bai Tu but he cuts his family ties and goes nowhere. In *Chungking Express*,

Chunking Mansion, a place for South Asian families and business, located in the tourist area Tsim Sha Tsui, is like a low-end version of globalization in Hong Kong. The fast food stall (where the film title "Express" is from), located in the hang-out area of a Western expatriate in Lan Kwai Fong in Central, which is like a high-end version of globalization in Hong Kong. The protagonists do not belong, and are not connected to either of these two groups. In *Fallen Angel*, the old Wanchai district was captured on celluloid before they disappeared. In *In the Mood for Love* Thailand is dressed as Hong Kong in the 1960s, just like Hong Kong was dressed as a town in Shanghai in old movies. In movie magic, it is all about how it looks on the outside. William Chang described the image design for the So Lai-chun character: "Shanghai immigrants of the time were fashion-conscious. Rich or poor, they put on the nicest clothes and tried to look their best. So Lai-chun was one such character, always wearing full makeup and nice clothes. You may say she is a plebian kind. I think the flashy outfits actually underscore the characters' weaknesses and conflicts. For this reason alone, the *qipao* (cheongsam) should be made ever more flowery…I was aiming for a plebian vulgarity..." (Zhang et al.) The Chinese title of the film, *Huayang Nianhua*, derived from a popular Shanghai Mandarin Song of the 1940s, roughly means to be in the prime of life. The audio and visual of the film is characterized by excessive varieties of languages, music styles, colors and patterns. It was an era where there were plenty of choices in cheongsams and consumer goods, but so few options in life. Inside the film text, the infidel husband ordered the song *Huayang de Nianhua* performed for his wife on local radio. Outside the text, the song was banned on radio in the 1960s and 1970s in Hong Kong for political reasons (K. C. Wong 29). Inside the film text, we see an emotionally starved man holding tight onto a rice cooker, a symbol of Asian modernity while listening to the (supposedly) banned song.

Fly is a face-conscious gangster and So Lai-chun is a fashion-conscious secretary. From the "Little Taiwan" (Tiu Keng Lang in *As Tears Go By*) to the "Little Shanghai" (the Shanghaiese émigré community in *In the Mood for Love*), Wong Kar Wai's characters are concerned about their appearance on the outside. They, recreating their homes in an alien environment, did not get anywhere. The city is colorful but the ordinary people's lives are humdrum. Wong Kar Wai's Hong Kong story is about the vanity of this city.

WONG KAR WAI IS A GAMBLER

The ending sequence of Wong Kar Wai's most personal film *Days of Being Wild* focuses on a gambler (Tony Leung). Like gambling, Wong Kar Wai's filmmaking process is full of randomness. He did not have a strong idea of the end result when he was shooting. In an interview explaining his filmmaking methods Wong Kar Wai said, "I'm not so sure what I want to find. It's like a building with a lot of exits but only one entrance. When you walk inside, you have to choose your exit." (Havis "Interview Wong Kar-Wai – One Entrance Many Exits" 16) Brian Tse associates Wong Kar Wai's filmmaking to a more specific building - Antoni Gaudi's Sagrada Familia, a catholic church which commenced construction in 1882, and is now still a work-in-progress. He wrote, "Wong Kar Wai never knows what his next scene will be – he doesn't even know what he is filming now. *Chungking Express* is a series of inevitable outcomes and changing conditions. It's like life and it keeps happening over and over again." (Tse 1) Instead of filming one film at a time, Wong Kar Wai was always working on a few projects simultaneously. He said, "I'm always thinking about making films, sometimes a

real movie, or like a circus in the old times. So we work together with a team, and then we can keep shooting. I have always dreamed of making ten films in eighteen months. You know, traveling along. People ask, 'Do you ever take a vacation?' Making a film for me, the actual process of production, is a vacation. I enjoy the process very much." (Brunette 128) Like Gaudi's cathedral, Wong Kar Wai's films have that work-in-progress touch. In respond to the question of why the shooting lasts so long, Wong Kar Wai said: "Yeah, sometimes it's because you just fall in love with the film. You don't want to let go." (128) Like gambling, it's the process, rather than the end result, that got him addicted to the game. In response to his friend Jimmy Ngai's question about his views on money, Wong Kar Wai admitted his gambler mentality and revealed his desire for a better home. He said, "Maybe you can't tell. I've been thinking day and night of hitting the jackpot…I think having a certain amount of money is important. It gives you more sense of security. Few days ago when I was at the gas station in New York I saw the lotto ticket sales. The prize was over 10 million US dollars. Everybody was buying them. I was thinking what I will do if I win the prize. What should I do next? Probably not much. Ten million dollars won't help much. Maybe I'll buy a better home and then I won't have the motivation to do anything else." (Ngai *Four Films* 203) In explaining how the projects *Days of Being Wild* and *Ashes of Time* attracted financiers he probably projected his own gambler mentality onto his investors. He said, "I always say that I have the personality of a gambler. If I gamble, I will not do horse racing or Mark Six lottery because I cannot control anything. To be more classy I will play Blackjack." Jimmy Ngai asked him, "But the two cards are handed to you by the banker." Wong Kar Wai replied,

"You can decide to accept it or pass, right?" (*Four Films*) Like his characters, Wong Kar Wai also has the illusion that he has the freedom to choose.

Wong Kar Wai made an analysis of the problem of the system of the Hong Kong film industry. He said, "In our field at present, there are always the same few people…I don't think the people participating in the game have a problem. Who will join the game depends on if the game is attractive. I think it's the game that has a problem…The problem is we are no longer a big film company that hires 8 to 10 screenwriters to brainstorm ideas. And then after half a year, suddenly one day one person says something and his idea is adopted to make a movie. Under the system of the big company, we can afford to support a group of people like that. And then one day they decide to use one of the ideas to make a bet. Why do they dare to bet? It is because they are big enough. They already have 9 films that certainly make a profit. They don't need to worry about the 10th. However, at present, who will dare to try out new things? Everyone capitalizes on instant success. Whenever a film makes a hit, they will hire the screenwriter of that hit movie…The major problem is, no one is willing to do the hard work of cultivation. They see the sweet potato on the ground and they will eat the sweet potato. They don't even care if the sweet potato is ripe or not. They will eat it first without thinking about the future." (*Four Films* 162-63) Paradoxically, it is the lack of planning for the future and the absence of organizational structure that enabled a filmmaker like Wong Kar Wai to carve out a space, and do his own thing in this industry in this era. Like the Maggie Cheung characters (in *As Tears Go By, Days of Being Wild, Ashes of Time,* and *In the Mood for Love*) Wong Kar Wai was delusional. He imagined the existence of an ideal

home out there (the big company with 9 sure things) and that he can just move in, fit in and be happy together with the other 9 tenants. But the Hong Kong film industry, like his male protagonist, was not a deep-rooted tree that could provide a dependable home base. The Hong Kong film industry was like bamboo. It survived by bending with the wind, not by growing roots. The gambler lives in a dream.

The year 2000 was a turning point in Hong Kong cinema. Wong Jing killed the prototype of his gambler character Luo Shihai (played by himself) in *My Name is Nobody* and ended the gambler genre. *Time and Tide* is an indication of Tsui Hark's "re-engagement with the Hong Kong environment and his glee in fighting a fresh cinematic battle on home ground after a stint in Hollywood…" as Stephen Teo described (Teo "Starting Over: Tsui Hark's Time and Tide (2000)"). Wong Kar Wai described *In the Mood for Love* is about the end of an era. He said, "It took me a long time to decide what the end should be. Is it basically a love story about these two characters? Finally I think it's more than that. It's about the end of a period. 1966 marks a turning point in Hong Kong's history. The Cultural Revolution in the mainland had lots of knock-on-effects, and forced Hong Kong people to think hard about their future. Many of them had come from China in the late 1940s, they'd nearly 20 years of relative tranquility, they'd built themselves new lives – and suddenly they began to feel they'd have to move on again. So 1966 is the end of something and the beginning of something else." (Rayns "In the Mood for Edinburgh" 16) What is the story of Hong Kong cinema 1990s about? Is it simply a legend about a petit industry surviving and thriving in the harsh colonial conditions and under Hollywood domination? What would happen to Hong Kong filmmakers when they

had to perch on different systems like the Hollywood studio, Asian co-production, or the film industry in China?

Table 8.1 Wong Kar Wai Filmography 1988-2000

Year	English Title	Release date	Box Office (HKD)	Stars	Crew	Awards
1988	*As Tears Go By*	Jun 9	11,532,283	Andy Lau Maggie Cheung Jacky Cheung Alex Man	Cinematographer: Andrew Lau; Art Director: William Chang; Music: Danny Chung; editing: Cheong Pi-tak	See the following page
1990	*Days of Being Wild*	Dec 15	9,751,942	Leslie Cheung Maggie Cheung Carina Lau Andy Lau Jacky Cheung Rebecca Pan Tony Leung	Art Director: William Chang; Cinematographer Christopher Doyle; Editing: Patrick Tam; Original Music, Leurona-Lombardo oflyne; Arranger George Leong	The 10th HK Film Awards: Best Film; Best Director; Best Actor; Best DP; Best Art Director; The 28th Golden Horse Awards; Best Director; Best Supporting Actress; Best Art Director; Best Editing; Best Sound Recording. 1997 Golden Bauhinia Award: best HK film of past ten years.
1994	*Chungking Express*	Jul 14	7,678,549	Tony Leung Takeshi Kaneshiro Faye Wong Brigitte Lin Valerie Chow	Cinematographer, Christopher Doyle, Andrew Lau; Music, Frankie Chan, Roel. A. Garcia	The 14th HK Film Awards: Best Film; Best Director; Best Actor; Best Editor,
1994	*Ashes of Time*	Sept 7	9,023,583	Leslie Cheung Tony K.F. Leung Tony Leung Brigitte Lin Maggie Cheung Carina Lau Jacky Cheung Charlie Young	Cinematographer, Christopher Doyle; Editor, Patrick Tam, William Chang Suk-ping, Hai Kit-wai; Kwong Chi-leung; Music, Franky Chan, Roel A. Garcia; Martial	51st Venice Film Festival : Ozella D'oro prize. The 14th HK Films Awards Best Cinema-tography; Best Art Director; Best Costume

					Arts Instructor, Sammo Hung; Art Director, William Chang	and Make up Design; The 31 Taiwan Golden Horse Award: Best editing, Best cinema-tography
1995	*Fallen Angel*	Sept 21	7,476,505	Leon Lai Michele Reis, Takeshi Kaneshiro Charlie Young Karen Mok	Production Designer, William Chang ; DP, Christopher Doyle; Editor, William Chang, Wong Ming-lam ; Music, Frankie Chan, Roel. A. Garcia	The 15th HK Film Awards : Best Suppor-ting Actress; Best Cinema-tography,; Best Original Film Score; The 32nd Golden Horse Awards : Best Film Editing; Best Art Direction,
1997	*Happy Together*	May 30	8,600,141	Tony Leung Leslie Cheung Chang Chen	DP, Christopher Doyle; Production Designer, William Chang; Editor, William Chang Wong Ming-lam	50th Cannes Film Festival: Best Director; The 17th HK Film Awards: Best Actor
2000	*In the Mood for Love*	Sept 29	8,663,227	Tony Leung Maggie Cheung Rebecca Pan Kelly Lai Siu Ping-lam	Production Designer, William Chang; Editor, William Chang; DP, Christopher Doyle, Mark Lee; Music, Michael Galasso	See the following page

The information of this table is from:

1. Hong Kong Film Archive – Collection Items Online Catalogue (http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/HKFA/en/6.php)
2. Hong Kong Films Yearbook (From 1989 to 1998), Hong Kong Kowloon & New Territories Motion Picture Industry Association (MPIA)

Table 8.2 Wong Kar Wai awards and nominations

Awards and nominations for *As Tears Go By* (1988) at 1989 Hong Kong Film Awards

Won: Best Supporting Actor (Jacky Cheung)

Won: Best Art Direction (William Chang)

Nominated: Best Picture

Nominated: Best Director (Wong Kar Wai)

Nominated: Best Actor (Andy Lau)

Nominated: Best Actress (Maggie Cheung)

Nominated: Best Supporting Actor (Alex Man)

Nominated: Best Cinematography (Andrew Lau)

Nominated: Best Film Editing (Cheong Pi-tak)

Nominated: Best Original Score (Danny Chung)

Awards for *In the Mood for Love*[141]

2000 Asia-Pacific Film Festival: Best Cinematography & Best Editing
2000 Cannes International Film Festival: Best Male Performance (Best Actor) & Grand Prix de la Technique (Technical Achievement Prize) Best Editing & Cinematography
2000 Edinburgh International Film Festival: Closing Night Film
2000 European Film Awards: Best Non-European Film
2000 Filmfest Hamburg: Douglas-Sirk Preis
2000 Golden Horse Awards: Best Leading Actress, Best Cinematography & Best Costume & Make Up Design
2000 Hong Kong Film Critics Society Awards: Films of Merit & Best Director
2001 British Independent Film Award: Best Foreign Film
2001 Cesar Award: Best Foreign Film
2001 German Film Awards: Best Foreign Film
2001 Golden Bauhinia Awards, Hong Kong: Ten Best Chinese Films & Best Cinematography

Table 8.1 cont.
2001 Hong Kong Film Awards: Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Art Direction, Best Costume & Make Up Design & Best Film Editing
2001 New York Film Critics Circle Awards: Best Foreign Language Film & Best Cinematography
2001 Uruguayan Film Critics Association Awards: Best Film
2001 Valdivia International Film Festival: Best Film
2002 Argentinean Film Critics Association Awards: Best Foreign Film
2002 Chlotrudis Awards: Best Movie & Best Cinematography
2002 Cinema Writers Circle Awards: Best Foreign Film
2002 Fotogramas de Plata: Best Foreign Film
2002 National Society of Film Critics Awards: Best Foreign Language Film & Best Cinematography
2007 Hong Kong Film Month: The 10th Anniversary of HKSAR Film Election: Best Actress

Chapter 9 Conclusion: Be Water

"Empty your mind, be formless, shapeless - like water. Now you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup, you put water into a bottle, it becomes the bottle, you put it in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Now water can flow or it can crash. Be water, my friend."

Bruce Lee

This dissertation is about how Hong Kong cinema and its filmmakers survived through adversity. Hong Kong cinema survived and thrived by being flexible, developing a peculiar system well adapted to its particular insecure habitat. The history of the Hong Kong film industry was characterized by crumbling down and rebuilding and its system, which was characterized by amoeba-like change between a "studio system" of production and independent production. Like the bamboo blossom, Hong Kong cinema often came back to life in a different form. When the national market was closed, it changed from a sub-national dialect cinema in Southern China to a Diaspora cinema for overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and North America. When the traditional market in Southeast Asia collapsed, Hong Kong cinema changed to a transnational cinema aiming at East Asia and the West. The industry in the 1990s was populated by more than 170 independent production houses headed mostly by filmmakers that came and went. Some filmmakers stayed and those that had maintained relatively long careers and thrived in the local or international markets were those who adapted to and were enabled by the system

of Hong Kong cinema. Hong Kong cinema, without the form of a national cinema or the structure of an integrated studio system of production, adapted to its environment like bamboo; its filmmakers, adapting to this changing system, were like water, formless and accommodating. The case studies show how each of the typed directors at various market positions developed his personal mode of production that helped him to produce films efficiently and to meet the market demand. Like the creative producer of classical Hollywood, they were the human agents in the system, balancing the art and business dimensions. But unlike the Hollywood producer, they were not at the apex of power in a hierarchical organization that conferred them authority. As industry-savvy auteurs, they were situated authors in a situated industry in a situated city selling particular dreams to a particular target audience in an era when Hong Kong had a particular discursively constructed positive image as a modern Chinese city, especially in relation to China.

In the 1990s Hong Kong filmmakers operated in an industry that was in a survival mode. The industry was not expected to last much longer beyond the city's sovereignty change. The very promise of "no change for 50 years" after 1997 by the Chinese government indicated the very uncertain character of life in this non-sovereign city. The signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984 started the 13-years transitional period. However accomplished Hong Kong cinema was during this period, it was not expected to last. In a 1984 interview Ng See Yuen said, "Movie is a speculative business. There is no long term planning. We can at most predict the trend of the next few months." (Luo et al.) (In a 1994 interview he plainly said Hong Kong cinema would soon disappear (W. He "Ng See Yuen Says"). In 1994, Eric Tsang, a veteran filmmaker and

one of the founders of United Film Organization (UFO), pointed out the two major factors that contribute to the instability of the industry during the transitional period: first, the absence of deep-pocketed investors willing to back the Hong Kong film industry; second, the 1997 deadline factor (Xiaowen Yang "Eric Tsang"). UFO was a co-op-like film production company founded in 1993 that rose quickly to prominence. But the five filmmaker-founders only planned for the company to operate for five years regardless of its performance. This showed the filmmakers' count-down mentality towards 1997. The sense of impermanence shaped the filmmakers business decision. The year 1984 confirmed the return of Hong Kong to China and eliminated any chance of extending the British lease or maintaining the status quo. Hong Kong filmmakers started to think seriously about their future. It started an era of a Hong Kong cinema. Filmmakers who stayed in the game usually worked with a count-down mentality, trying to make more movies when they still could before the sovereignty change. In 2003 the signing of the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) marked a new chapter in the history of Hong Kong cinema, with the target market of the industry is now clearly in China. This signaled the disappearance of Hong Kong cinema with distinctive cultural flavor. In between the traumatic event of 1989 and the 1997 sovereignty change, Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s represented a distinctive period in the history of the industry. The system of Hong Kong cinema that developed during this transitional period, with no government or major company steering its direction, was not designed for long-term development. It was just a pragmatic survival strategy in a dire situation. Political uncertainty and economic insecurity were the two determining factors

that shaped the Hong Kong film industry in the 1990s. A horizontal organization structure and small- to medium-scale company size helped Hong Kong cinema to be more adaptable to unpredictable changes in the markets.

Hong Kong cinema was neither a producer cinema like Hollywood nor a director cinema like most national cinemas. Despite the lack of the industrial form of a coherent studio system, Hong Kong cinema was like the classical cinema described by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson. It was also a capitalist machine in which the mode of production was connected with film style. And like Thomas Schatz's description of the genius of the system of classical Hollywood, the system of Hong Kong cinema was also autonomous. It balanced various historical forces and sustained a productive industry producing films with consistent style. It survived in a harsh environment for almost a century; it allowed for the coexistence of art films and mass entertainment and provided an outlet for collective cultural expression of dimensions not covered by Hollywood or Chinese cinema. It allowed for auteur directors to exercise their personal vision, making them a presence even as Hollywood dominated the region. Like Newcomb and Hirsch described of American television, it served as a cultural forum for discussion of common concern, anxieties and dreams in East Asia. Despite its status as a colony, Hong Kong benefited from the world's asymmetrical power structure. Being a Chinese society under British colonization gave Hong Kong cinema material and cultural advantages. As the trade port for the British Empire, Hong Kong's commercial and transnational cinema benefited from the infrastructure built for international trade. The overseas Chinese financial network and the practice of cash-based *pianhua* financing method enabled the Hong

Kong film industry to circumvent the control of the dominant British banks. Situated at the junction of the two major network civilizations, the Anglosphere and Chopstick Culture, legacies of the British Empire and the Chinese Celestial Empire, Hong Kong cinema was able to be culturally accessible to a large part of the world's population familiar with the narratives from both civilizations. But more importantly the peculiar colonial discourse of Hong Kong being modernized via Western colonization helped form a favorable myth for Hong Kong. As a colony of a Western power closely associated with Western modernization and achieved economic miracle while maintaining Chinese cultural practice, Hong Kong was regarded as a model of modern Chinese city, one that was between China and the West. The crackdown of the democratic movement in Beijing in 1989 and Hong Kong's role in supporting the students' movement further accentuated Hong Kong's association with Western liberal thought. Imperialist and nationalist policies in East Asia region were characterized by discourse of economic development and soft authoritarian rule justified in the name of national development. The Chinese government, insisting on maintaining the colonial governmental feature after 1997 to ensure Hong Kong's "stability and prosperity," implicitly endorsed and acknowledged the contribution of British colonization. A favorable cultural myth is important for an export-oriented entertainment film industry like Hong Kong cinema. Hong Kong cinema was thus situated in a privileged discursive position to export cultural products to the West and the East, to audiences that agreed with the linear model of modernization and the leadership role of Western power. Even though Hong Kong was situated in the interstitial space between Chinese nationalism and

British colonialism and under the pressure of global capitalism, in popular discourse and mainstream Hong Kong cinema, the city was depicted as a postmodern hybrid wonderland. Michal Curtin's media capital theory recognized that film industries originated mostly in cities. Curtin's study on Hong Kong cinema recognizes it as a city cinema. To borrow Koichi Iwabuchi's cultural odor theory which claims that a cultural product is conferred positive cultural image from its country of origin, Hong Kong cinema was considered desirable because of its place of origin. Hong Kong was regarded as a modern city and yet retained its Chinese cultural essence. Hong Kong cinema of the 1990s was branded as an urban Chinese cinema characterized by its neurotic energy while maintaining its Chinese cultural flavor. It was at once resistant and acquiescent to Western supremacy and adopted a cultural strategy that was complicit and self-conflicting. The transnational genres of Hong Kong cinema were the embodiment of the conflicting issues of colonial modernity in East Asia. The transnational stars were embodiment of the desirable mythologized image of Hong Kong. To borrow Thomas Schatz's notion of the implicit contract between industry and audience in Hollywood genre filmmaking, the stars and genres of Hong Kong cinema were essential to the contract between Hong Kong filmmakers and their audiences. They represented the idealized cultural self-image of Hong Kong that was agreed upon by three partners: the domestic audience, the overseas audience and Hong Kong filmmakers.

To borrow and combine Timothy Corrigan's idea of "the commerce of auteurism" and John Caldwell's industrial auteur theory, the typed directors of Hong Kong cinema, situated in a commercial system, were commercially constructed auteurs who were savvy

about how the industry worked, and were adept in matching star and genre with particular markets and in consciously cultivated their images. Each of these industrial auteurs took advantage of the director-centric production approach in the system of Hong Kong cinema and developed a personal mode of production suitable to his personality, persona and training background. They explored the local condition of orphan island anxiety, the paradoxical phenomenon of political anxiety commensurate with economic achievement. Their films told a distinctive local story and thus exhibit a strong Hong Kong cultural sensibility despite being export-oriented, catering to foreign tastes.

Given the Hong Kong film industry's director-centric production approach, the director was the major factor for the choice of cast and crew, genre, filmmaking method and style of films. The three cases of the typed directors illustrate how each of these commercially constructed industrial auteurs positioned and differentiated himself in relation to the marketplace. The auteur directors, as situated authors, balanced various forces within the system. Wong Jing was the top box office director in the domestic market in the 1990s. His target markets were Hong Kong's domestic market, Taiwan and mostly Southeast Asia. He adopted the traditional apprentice system, and the traditional *pianhua* mode of financing. He became known for efficient production and for using traditional Chinese story-telling. He developed a distinctive script-writing approach in which he finished a script in a few days, creating characters from prototypes that he developed during his television years. The leading stars of his gambler films were different versions of his alter ego: one who honors the traditional Chinese ethic code, was extremely hardworking and became the champion of his field. His gambler films

represented his fantastic imagination of Hong Kong as a Chinese cosmopolitan space which suspended the inherent conflict between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. And his world-traveling protagonist was a gambling champion who transcended his base profession and the random fate of life.

Tsui Hark's initial career path was characterized by his zigzag moves between radical, socially relevant films on the one hand and formulaic mass entertainment on the other. Later he founded with his wife Nansun Shi a production house, Film Workshop, which operated for a quarter of a century, longer than many big companies. Tsui Hark and his wife acted as parental figures to their staff. Tsui Hark maintained close tie with his brainstorming group and formed a surrogate family in the office. Film Workshop was like a satellite company to big companies like Golden Harvest and Golden Princess but without a formal tie, and thus Tsui Hark retained his creative autonomy. Tsui Hark's films sold in Asian and Western markets. With his brainstorming group on payroll and big companies' support in financing and distribution, Tsui Hark could churn out sequels quickly when *Once Upon a Time in China* became a hit. The series of martial arts genre films focused on the heroic acts of the regional folk hero, Wong Fei Hung, providing an affirmation of Southern Chinese culture, one that was more about modern Hong Kong reflecting on modernization than about China in the past resisting Westernization.

Wong Kar Wai's films did not have a broad audience base in the domestic or Asian markets. But Wong Kar Wai had a strong following in the art cinema and film festival markets in both Europe and Asia. He worked with a small circle of close friends. He along with production designer William Chang and cinematographer Christopher

Doyle were called the “magnificent trio,” and their films were known for their visual expressivity, a prominent characteristic of European art cinema. The discursively constructed image of Hong Kong as a Chinese cosmopolitan city may have conferred symbolic meaning to Hong Kong cinema as a liberal and lively Chinese culture industry. This may be the appeal of the Hong Kong film industry to talents and filmmakers from various parts of the world. Wong Kar Wai’s cast and crew were more diversified than other productions in terms of race, languages, and cultural backgrounds. Wong Kar Wai movies are influenced by European art cinema, Latin American literature and music, Japanese and Hong Kong literature, old Mandarin cinema and contemporary Hong Kong cinema. His oeuvre has the most hybrid and cosmopolitan outlook. He started in his first films to straddle the gap between art and commerce. The art-house cinema cult following in the Japanese market and the international film festival market sustained and catapulted his career. Wong Kar Wai’s star-studded art films expose the vanity of life in Hong Kong. By adopting the mainstream genre like gangster and martial arts, he paradoxically deconstructed the mythical representation of Hong Kong in those genre films.

The case of Hong Kong cinema illustrates how a small industry, by adapting to its habitat and balancing various historical forces, survived and thrived in the world even without the material power of Hollywood or the state protection of national cinema. Its typed directors, as industrial auteurs, adapted to the peculiar system of Hong Kong cinema, balancing various material and cultural forces and capitalizing on Hong Kong’s favorable cultural myth. They survived and succeeded in the local and international markets, even without the backing of well financed studios or state support. The Hong

Kong film industry was flexible like bamboo and the industrial auteurs were accommodating like water.

The case of Hong Kong cinema was peculiar. Current film criticism and scholarship, dominated by approaches geared either to national cinema or to the Hollywood studio system, have not treated Hong Kong cinema as a distinctive industrial form. Hong Kong cinema simply does not fit in existing theoretical models which were developed to explain industrial form of a cinema situated in a nation state that has the political might to enforce protective measure for its national cinema, or situated in powerful nation like the U.S., where Hollywood benefits from strong banking and finance sectors to underwrite its high-stakes production. Existing theoretical models on auteur and authorship have not extended to study the relationship between the industrial auteur and the film industry's organizational structure. Hong Kong filmmakers came from a film industry which did not have the form of a studio and was neither a producer's cinema nor a director's cinema. Being heavily dependent on overseas markets, the system of the Hong Kong film industry was nomadic and the filmmakers were itinerant. Despite the lack of the physical site of a studio and the absence of a creative producer at the apex of its organization, however, the Hong Kong film industry nonetheless was locally successful and internationally influential, and its filmmakers were able to devise their own efficient mode of production.

The system of Hong Kong cinema was developed within a territory which did not have sovereign power like a nation but enjoyed considerable autonomy. Situated in a peculiar colony with economic achievement and soft authoritarian rule, and located

between British colonialism and Chinese nationalism, Hong Kong cinema was one manifestation of a distinctive political economy and cultural context. It was a condition commonly shared in East Asia, however. East Asian cinemas in nations like South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore were often located in a sub-sovereign entity or in a country whose internal authority was heavily influence by external powers. Soft authoritarian rule was combined with rapid economic growth and people's lives were heavily impacted by global capitalist forces. With the rise of East Asian cinemas, the model of Hong Kong cinema might provide a useful reference for comparison. This dissertation is an attempt to find new ways to study Hong Kong film industry and its filmmakers that might help better understand East Asian cinemas and their filmmakers.

[1] In 1997, Hong Kong's per capita gross domestic product (GDP) was estimated at US$26,600. It was the second highest in Asia after Japan and surpassed Canada, Australia and Britain. Hong Kong's per capita income was the sixth highest in the world.

[2] The headline on the front cover of Mingpao Monthly is "Hong Kong Cinema is Already Dead", Mingpao Monthly is an intellectual magazine on politics and economics targeting educated readers (Fu Lie, Chiu Wing Lam, Chi Ma, Herman Yau, Ching Wai Chan and Thomas Shin, "The Death of Hong Kong Cinema," Mingpao Monthly Nov 1995. Film Bi-weekly (aka City Entertainment) also had a few paragraphs or articles here and there in 1995 describing the dire situation of Hong Kong cinema.

[3] Siao won the best actress award in 1995 Berlin Film Festival.

[4] King Hu was known for re-inventing the martial arts genre, dubbed as the "new epoch of *wuxia*". His best known works are *Come Drink With Me* (1966), *Dragon Gate Inn* (1967), and *A Touch of Zen* (1975) which won a technical prize at the Cannes film festival.

[5] Cecile Tang is known for her socially critical art cinema. At present, the only book-length study on her is Ching Yau, Filming Margins: Tang Shu Shuen, a Forgotten Hong Kong Woman Director (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2004).

[6] Bauhinia was adopted as the floral emblem of Hong Kong in 1965. Since 1997 the flower appears on Hong Kong's flag and coins, replacing the British flag and Queen's head. *Bauhinia blakeana* is a hybrid and is sterile flower. It does not produce seeds.

[7]Even as late as the 1980s, film was still regarded by many as an illegitimate business. There were still distinctive division between the "red trousers" (veteran filmmakers trained in the industry) and those hailing from college film education.

[8] Illiteracy and a lack of formal education was common among the older generation of, likely due to the long years of war in contemporary Chinese history and low social status of the entertainment profession which deterred educated people from joining.

[9]The Oral History project began with the priority on very experienced filmmakers who were mostly in their 70s to 90s. Around 2002 I proposed to interview the executive producers who are mostly still in their 40s to 50s. I proposed this on the grounds that the important role of the producers was going overlooked, and that Hong Kong filmmakers traveled and migrated a lot. There has been no documentation of their works in Hong Kong. Once they retired or moved elsewhere, it would be hard to save this valuable information. I later published a paper on producers of Hong Kong cinema (Cindy S.C. Chan, "Housekeeper of Hong Kong Cinema: The Role of Producer in the System of Hong Kong Film Industry," Wide Screen 2 (2010), <http://widescreenjournal.org/index.php/journal/article/view/84/127>. See also chapter 5.

[10]The Hong Kong Film Archive published two anthologies on the Shaw and the Cathay studios, the two major studios in Hong Kong in the 1960s. Another library source is the Hong Kong collection section of Hong Kong University library. However, Hong Kong cinema is so export-oriented that Hong Kong historians like Chung Po-yin have to go to Singapore to collect information on Cathay studio.

[11]http://www.tdctrade.com/econforum/tdc/tdc010303.htm

[12] From my interviews and informal chatting with Hong Kong producers, the producers estimated that there were about 1,000 active members of the filmmaking community in the 1990s.

[13] "Gossipy" is the term used by producer Jessinta Liu in describing the information flow in the industry.

[14] On the back cover of the reprint in 1978, it was stated that this book is the only film history classic ever since there was film industry in China.

[15]"Central Plain" view is a peculiarly Chinese world view. It is an "inner-outer" concentric-circle model of hierarchical. For example, the traditional sense of polity has the emperor at the center. "(T)hose who fell from favor were exiled to the periphery – the more undesirable, the farther from the center. The periphery represented the uncivilized and the weak, whereas political strength and cultural sagacity were concentrated in the state capital" Reginald Yin-Wang Kwok and Roger T. Ames, "A Framework for Exploring the Hong Kong-Guangdog Link," The Hong Kong-Guangdog Link: Partnership in Flux, ed. Reginald Yin-Wang and Alvin Y. So Kwok (Hong Kong UP, 1995) 8. In history, Hong Kong/Guangzhou is situated at the Southern tip of China, which was labeled as the "Southern Barbarian" region

[16] "Zhuti" means principal part, the subject (vis-à-vis "object"), the Self.(vis-à-vis "the others")

[17] In Cai's word, contemporary Hong Kong cinema is reduced to one mode: "entertainment". He writes, "Undeniably, in contemporary Hong Kong cinema, film mainly is in a 'entertainment mode'; that is, it emphasizes its entertainment function to people living in a highly stressful urban life (in some films, they provide the function of understanding history and society). Therefore, in Hong Kong, the entire field of film is regarded as an "entertainment circle". Entertainment film is the absolute mainstream of Hong Kong cinema….this has advantages and disadvantages. It can produce a lot of creative and edifying films. It can also produce harmful trashy movies…" Hongsheng Cai, Jialing Song and Guiqing Liu, eds., 80 Years of Hong Kong Film (Beijing Broadcasting Institute P, 2000) 1.

[18]In the preface they write with a cultural elitist tone, "Unlike cinema in the Mainland and Taiwan, Hong Kong cinema survives and develops in an open market with no protection. The colonial government never regarded film as art, not to mention their lack of support and financing of movies. Among the three territories (China, Taiwan and Hong Kong), only Hong Kong cinema is really led by market. The filmmakers regarded the audience as "god" and they struggle hard to support themselves! The changing trend of Hong Kong cinema…is an expression of "the god's will". In this commercial system, film is a business. Hong Kong cinema is ....for the mass audience. It is hard to find niche movies for the cultural elitist in Hong Kong cinema. Commercialism is its key ingredient. Priority is given to entertainment and profit making…To cater for the market, they do not care about if it is healthy or not. There are so many sloppy productions and speculative works." Chengren Zhou and Yizhuang Li, Early History of Hong Kong Cinema (1897-1945) (Hong Kong: Joint, 2005) iii.

[19] By 1990, Hong Kong and Taiwan were the largest foreign investors in China. Over 60% of all Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in mainland China came from Hong Kong. Hong Kong investment was concentrated in the Guangdong Province. By 1991, there were 20,000 Hong Kong firms employing more than 3 million workers in Guangdong. Taiwan's investment in China has been mostly in Guangdong and Fujian and it increased to U.S. $2 billion in 1990 and U.S. $4 billion in mid 1992. On-Kwok Lai and Alvin Y. So, "Hong Kong and the Newly Industrializing Economies: From Americanization to Asianization," Hong Kong's Reunion with China: Global Dimensions, eds. Gerard A. Postiglione and James T.H. Tang (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 1997) 112.

[20] Andrew Scobell was born and grew up in Hong Kong. At the time of the first print of his article, he was the Research Assistant in the Foreign Policy Studies Program, the Brookings Institution.

[21] Law cites two prominent examples: Ambrose Y.C. King's renowned idea of "administrative absorption of politics" and Lau Siu-kai's idea of "utilitarianistic familism". For King's idea read Ambrose Y.C. King, "Administrative Absorption of Politics in Hong Kong: Emphasis on the Grass-Roots Level," Hong Kong Government and Politics, ed. Ming Sing (Hong Kong: Oxford UP, 2003). For Lau's idea on Hong Kong democracy, read Siu-kai Lau and Hsin-chi Kuan, "Partial Democratization, 'Foundation Moment' and Political Parties in Hong Kong," Hong Kong Government and Politics, ed. Ming Sing (Hong Kong: Oxford UP, 2003).

[22] For more about Northbound cultural imaginary read "section I: preliminary study of Northbound cultural imaginary" in Stephen C.K. Chan, ed., Cultural Imaginary and Ideology: Contemporary Hong Kong Culture and Politics Review (Hong Kong: Oxford UP, 1997).

[23] For an academic example of China imposing its perspective on Hong Kong history read Wang-chi Wong, The Burden of History: A Hong Kong Perspective of the Mainland Discourse of Hong Kong History (Hong Kong: Oxford UP, 2000).

[24]The original quote is "the American cinema is a classical art, but why not then admire in it what is most admirable, i.e. not only the talent of this or that filmmaker, but the genius of the system. – Andre Bazin, 1957"

[25] A more elaborate argument on Olson's multi-cultural theory and my analysis of Hong Kong's specific hybrid culture is presented at Global Fusion conference and published on: Shu Ching Chan, "Hong Kong Cinema in the Global Market: The Competitive Advantage of Network Civilizations," Global Media Journal 3 (2004), <http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/sp05/sp04/graduatesp04/gmj-sp04gradref-

chan.htm>.

[26] It "emphasizes the fusion between the political economy of globalized Marxism and the discourse theory of Foucault" (19).

[27] In Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage, 1978) 7.

[28]http:www.mpaa.org/anti-piracy/

[29] In the 2000s, Hong Kong economy remains characterized by SMEs. According to Hong Kong government statistics "Hong Kong The Fact"**: "**SMEs are an important driving force in Hong Kong's economic development. As at December 2009, there were about 282,000 SMEs in Hong Kong. They constituted over 98 per cent of the territory's business units and accounted for about 48 per cent of private sector employment. The Government attaches great importance in supporting SMEs at various stages of development. (http://www.gov.hk/en/about/abouthk/factsheets/docs/trade&industry.pdf)

[30] In 1972, the UN General Assembly removed Hong Kong from its list of colonial territories after China insisted Hong Kong political status to be "a Chinese territory under British administration". In official language, Hong Kong changed from a "Crown Colony" to a "Dependent Territory".

[31]Genre was one of the four basic elements that overseas financiers asked from Hong Kong productions (the other three were cast, budget and delivery date.) *Wuxia* was the most popular among the Taiwan financiers, and filmmakers usually could get more funding if they were willing to make these genre films.

[32] "Hong Kong survived the intense Sino-British antagonism during the transition period (1980s-1997) as well as the last 150-year period and "thrived in a spectacularly creative mode by maintaining a precarious balance between China and Britain." Ming K. Chan, ed., Precarious Balance: Hong Kong between China and Britain 1842-1992 (New York: East Gate, 1994) 5.

[33] Steve Tsang borrows this term from J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," Economic History Review 6.1 (1953).

[34] The whole picture is complicated. Part of Hong Kong was on lease and part of it was permanently ceded to Britain. The deal was made after China's defeat in the Opium Wars under unequal treaties in which China never acknowledged as legitimate. So, the general understanding was that in 1997 Britain had to return Hong Kong to China in one piece.

[35] As many scholars have pointed out, this is quite a high percentage of population living in government housing in a capitalist city, and only Singapore can compare with it.

[36] In the hearing, it was explicitly stated that the United States would not interfere in Hong Kong because Hong Kong was under Britain's administration.

[37] C. K. Lau quotes from Frank Welsh (1994) British Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston dismissed Hong Kong as "a barren island with hardly a house upon it." Lau comments that since then, virtually every article or book on Hong Kong in the English language has cited the epithet, or "a barren rock" for short as a handy description of Hong Kong.

[38] In 1997, "Hong Kong's per capita gross domestic product (GDP), estimated at US$26,600, was the second highest in Asia after Japan, having surpassed Canada, Australia, and its former colonial master, Britain. Expressed in terms of actual purchasing power, Hong Kong's per capita income was the sixth highest in the world." C.K. Lau, Hong Kong's Colonial Legacy: A Hong Kong Chinese's View of the British Heritage (Hong Kong: Chinese UP, 1997) 58.

[39] In his book Brief History of Hong Kong Liu Shuyong argues otherwise, implicitly against the British "barren rock" version of early Hong Kong history. He traces Hong Kong history back to 6,000 years ago and asserts that before the British annexation in 1841 China had executed effective administration over Hong Kong. And there was certain amount of development in agriculture, fishing, salt, shipping, pearl acquisition, incense manufacturing and education. During the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1644, 1644-1911) Hong Kong occupied an important status for military defense. A systematic military defense system was established. Liu argues convincingly that Hong Kong was not exactly a terra incognita. But still it was minuscule compared to today's cosmopolitan juggernaut. Shuyong Liu, A Brief History of Hong Kong (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (H.K.) Co., Ltd., 1998).

[40] There is an entire section "De-Mystifying 'Positive Non-interventionism'" (3.2) in Kam-yee Law and

Kim-ming Lee, eds., The Economy of Hong Kong in Non-Economic Perspectives (Hong Kong: Oxford UP, 2004).

[41] The rapid economic growth was between 1960 and 1985.

[42]1945 saw the end of Sino-Japanese war and Hong Kong returned to British colonial rule. The 1945-1959 period is the time of the Cold War (between the capitalist bloc and communist bloc) and the civil war (between the Communist Party and the KMT). 1997 is the year Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty.

[43] Even prominent stars and filmmakers would rather work as hawkers selling cigarettes and flowers for their livelihood. Zhou and Li, Early History of Hong Kong Cinema (1897-1945).

[44] Most film industry professional associations gradually emerged as late as the 1980s and 1990s. But still they have no labor union with a strong organization and bargaining power.

[45] China theater covered China, Indo-China and Thailand.

[46] It was better known in Chinese as Zhonglian (short for Zhonghua Lianhe Zhipian Gufeng Gongsi). Its predecessor was the China Movie Company, better known in Chinese as Zhongdian (short for Zhonghua Dianying Gongsi). Its successor is the China United Film Company Limited, better known in Chinese as Huaying (short for Zhonghua Dianying Lianghe Gufeng Youxian Gonsi).

[47] His widow Tong Yuejun is still active in Taiwan, and the organization for coordinating and facilitating Hong Kong filmmakers to produce or launch their films in Taiwan.

[48] "Ny" is New York on the American continent. "lon" is London on the European continent and "kong" is Hong Kong on the Asian continent. Michael Eliot, "Tale of Three Cities", Time Magazine on-line, Thur Jan17, 2008. http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1704398,00.html

[49] http://indexmundi.com/hong_kong/inflation_rate_(consumer_prices).html; Original source: International Monetary Fund.

Hong Kong inflation rate 1980-2000

Year		**Year**		**Year**		**Year**	
1980	4.444	1985	3.551	1990	10.253	1995	9.043
1981	9.479	1986	3.579	1991	11.259	1996	6.334
1982	10.948	1987	5.716	1992	9.544	1997	5.801
1983	9.961	1988	7.837	1993	8.82	1998	2.834
1984	8.574	1989	10.187	1994	8.795	1999	-3.947
						2000	-1.607

[50] For example, as pointed out by Ronald Skeldon the "economies of Australia, Canada, and the United States are still mired in extremely slow growth, averaging a rates of growth of GDP per capita of 3.4 percent per annum each in the 1980s. Hong Kong averaged 7.1 percent growth over the same period." (Skeldon 47)

[51] In 2007, the Gini index was 43.4. http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/data_sheets/cty_ds_HKG.html State of the World's Cities 2008/2009, released in London on October 22 by UN-HABITAT http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?cid=5979&catid=5&typeid=6&subMenuId=0

[52] Richard A. Boucher said, "…what I like to call Hong Kong's genius. When it comes to international commerce, this city is truly a creative force, spinning magic from the ether. Hong Kong people have a sense for identifying and developing opportunities that otherwise would not exist. They know how to bring together a marketing opportunity in the U.S., Europe, or Japan, financing from Asia or outside, the right technology, the right manufacturing elements (often in China, but more and more frequently elsewhere), and the management capabilities that make a business deal happen, and happen quickly. I don't know of any other place where this process repeats itself so often and so efficiently. These qualities have made Hong Kong a crossroads of capital and markets, an open city based on open trade. Everything here is international, virtually every firm, however small, a multinational" February 18, 2011. .http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/cg_rb1997110601.html

[53] For example, in 1993-94 I worked at the program acquisition department of STAR TV. One of the major

references we used for buying Hong Kong movies was Hong Kong box office record even though the movies would be shown to a few dozen countries. In the 1980s- 1990s, the link between Hong Kong box office figure and selling price to overseas markets was the motivation for producers to boost impressive Hong Kong box office by various means. See chapter 5 exhibition sector.

[54] In "Hong Kong Film New Action – Business Forums and Promotional Sessions" held in Hong Kong in 2009 Feng Xiaogang was caught cursing in public when discussing overseas market. He angrily says, "…my movie *If You Are the One* sold 350 million in China but only over 1 million in Hong Kong – was it really that bad?" March 26, 2009 http://ent.sina.com.cn/s/m/2009-03-26/13222439868.shtml Interestingly Feng attributed the bad box office performance to Hong Kong audience's taste. He said Hong Kong audience found Mainland movies rustic. " (Taiwan) Wei Te-Sheng's *Cape No. 7* sold only 100 million, Hong Kong audience knows about this movie and this director. Why? Hong Kong audience looks down upon movies from Mainland China…My movies sold well for ten years, but my fame is not as big as Wei Te-Sheng in last year. Hong Kong audience does not care about us." **"**Feng Xiaogang denounce Hong Kong audience: You look down upon me and I won't come back" March 27, 2009. http://et.21cn.com/star/zhuixing/neidi/2009/03/27/6056810.shtml

[55] In 2005 Chan Wing-mei was the president of Hong Kong Theatre Association and a government-appointed member of Hong Kong Film Development Committee.

[56] For the 1984 incident, read Film Bi-Weekly issue 146 p.4-7, issue 156 p.28-29; for the1992 incident, issue 336 p.19-24, issue 454 p.88-89, issue 457 28-29

[57] The full name is Hong Kong, Kowloon and New Territories Motion Picture Industry Association Ltd. "The MPIA was established in 1939. It is a private business organization. In 1979 it was registered as a limited company. The organization mission is to protect fellow member's interests and serves as a bridge between the government and theater business." In 1985 it had 91 theaters as its members. Only 4 theaters were left out from this organization. In the past, the MPIA was divided into 3 small groups: the first-run Western film circuit, the Mandarin film circuit, and second-run film circuit. But as the business evolved, the distinction between the various groups disappeared. "M.P.I.A.," Film Bi-Weekly 1985.

[58] His Chinese name is Kong Chi-keung. He is the Executive Director of Edko Films Ltd. In 2005 he was a government-appointed member of the Hong Kong Film Development Committee (FDC). In FDC press releases he is generally recognized as a film producer who has successfully brought Hong Kong and Chinese films to the international arena.

[59] Ng See Yuan is currently the Chairman of Federation of Hong Kong Filmmakers and an Honorary President of Hong Kong Film Directors' Guild.

[60] It was around 2001. Rita Fung is my friend from college and we studied and made films together.

[61]The issues are 166 to 171 and 174 .

[62] In the 1990s Film Bi-Weekly's office in Causeway Bay was only a few hundred square feet with probably less than ten staff stationed in the office. In the 1990s I wrote a couple of articles for this film magazine and visited the office a few times.

[63] In this dissertation, I use "independent film" to refer only to commercial independents, not the genuine independent filmmaking with a critical edge.

[64] Spring Festival couplets and *huichun* are paper strips pasted on gateposts, door panels and walls with generic standardized positive greeting words like "kung hei fat choy" (wish for lots of fortune), wish for good health, good business, good performance in school, or all wishes come true etc.

[65] The top box office hit that year is Wong Jing's *God of Gambler* starring Chow Yun-fat, which was released from December 14 to Jan 25 and shown in the Golden Princess circuit.

[66] Ng See Yuan was then one of the five committee members of the Provisional Committee of Hong Kong Film Workers Against the Re-censor System set up in December 1982

[67] "Public order ordinance" is in chapter 245 of the Hong Kong Regulations. It restricts Hong Kong people's civil liberties in public assembly and public procession in order for the government to maintain public order. The ordinance was first established in 1967 after the 1967 Riots and stipulated that assembly of more than 3 persons needed a permit from the government authority. In 1971 the ordinance was further tightened to restrict legal public assembly to five designated places. In 1980, the regulation was relaxed and

required a permit for public assembly of over 30 people and procession of over 20 people. In 1995, the ordinance was found to be in conflict with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Some restrictions were relaxed. The registration system was replaced with a notification system and the Commissioner of Police must be notified of a public procession at least 7 days before the procession. However China argued that the 1995 version of the Public Ordinance was in conflict with the Basic Law (the mini-constitution for future Hong Kong SAR). In 1997, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) of China passed a resolution that reinstated some previously canceled regulations, changed the notification system and allowed the authority to reserve the right to object to public assembly and procession.

[68] (Barbieri 95) Original source: Johannes Chan, "Freedom of Expression: Censorship and Obscenity", in Civil Liberties in Hong Kong, edited by Raymond Wacks, second edition (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UniversityPress, 1989) 208-242. The incident was also widely reported in Hong Kong newspapers and Film Bi-weekly.

[69] In 1993, Anson Chan Fang On Sang became the 30th and last Chief Secretary. She mainly oversaw the localization of the civil service during her time in this position. Chan was the first woman and the first ethnic Chinese to hold the second-highest governmental position in Hong Kong. The highest governmental position in Hong Kong, that of Governor, was always held by a British person before Hong Kong's handover to China.

[70] An earlier version of this section is published in Widescreen Journal (Chan, "Housekeeper of Hong Kong Cinema: The Role of Producer in the System of Hong Kong Film Industry."

[71] Frankel writes: "…Being different from men isn't something to change or hide…Women bring a unique set of behaviors to the work-place that are needed, especially in today's climate. Our tendencies to collaborate rather than compete, listen more than talk, and use relationships rather than muscle to influence…" (62)

[72] Evans writes, "Once you leave the corporate arena, you don't have the same impact on big business, which in turn means you don't have the same impact on the world. If we are going to make our marketing and our products more female and more family-friendly, we need to be part of the team creating them. It's important that we inhabit the places of power in as many positions as possible…. Large corporations shape our lives. They produce the entertainment shows that we decry…The more we're around to make key decisions, the more they will go our way." (156-157)

[73] Schatz writes, "The quality and artistry of all these films were the product not simply of individual human expression, but of a melding of institutional forces. In each case the 'style' of a writer, director, or costume designer – fused with the studio's production operations and management structure, its resources and talent pool, its narrative traditions and market strategy. And ultimately any individual's style was no more than an inflection on an established studio style." (6)

[74] When I asked Jessinta Liu how she got industry information, she said, "People in our field are very gossipy. Whatever happened in the morning, the whole town will know in the afternoon."

[75] This casual conversation with my college friend was around summer 2001.

[76] This casual conversation with my college friend was around summer 2001.

[77] The conversation with Liu Damu was around 2001. Liu was a core member of Tsui Hark's brainstorming writer group. He is also my senior in college.

[78] Lorraine Ho is my senior in college and I worked in her student productions a few times. We already knew each other but haven't met again since college. Ho's communication skill is seen in her initiative in breaking the ice and warming up the conversation quickly.

[79] And of course I was also warned by a male filmmaker, "However soft those women look, don't mess with them." There are many rumors of woman producers who intimidate a man by verbally bullying him and forcing him to back up to the wall. But I am more interested in knowing how these women establish their authority and effectively deal with men who challenge them

[80] Rumor has it that Tsui Hark fell out with directors like King Hu, Yim Ho, and John Woo etc. In the interview I asked Tsui what he thought about this, Tsui did not confirm or deny the rumors but insisted that "Everyone should look at the end products, the films we finished."

[81] Sharon Hui (scriptwriter) mentions Nansun Shi's role as the boss's wife and a parental figure in Film Workshop. She says Tsui and Shi are a perfect team. Tsui takes care of the creative aspect of production, while Shi takes care of management. Hui says, 'Nansun Shi's communication skills helps Tsui Hark retain a lot of relationships and networks. Their parental role in the office helps create a harmonious atmosphere. This helps maintain close relationship." (Ho)
[82] In a casual and friendly chat with a female filmmaker, I was told that there is the unwritten rule that gay men cannot be executive producers in the Hong Kong film industry, and my source prefers to remain anonymous.
[83] It was around summer 2001 when I visited my friend Rita Fung on a set.
[84] For example, in an interview published in *Harvard Business Review* on Hong Kong style supply chain management Victor Fung of Li & Fung Ltd, Hong Kong's largest export trading company, describes how his company transforms from a traditional Chinese family conglomerate to an innovative international public company (Maretta) The book-length study is published in Hong Kong in Chinese (Li & Fung Research Center)
[85] His film *After The Crescent* (1997) was funded by Hong Kong Arts Development Council
[86] *Hold You Tight* won the Golden Horse Award for Best Supporting Actor, the Teddy Award at the Berlin International Film Festival and Film of Merit Award at the Hong Kong Film Critics Society Awards.
[87] For example, the *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World* series (1987, 1988); *All's Well End's Well* series (1992, 1993), *It's a Wonderful Life* (1997) etc.
[88] The Plain Jane character was played by Josephine Siao in the TV and movie versions.
[89] But of course, disciplined actors like Michael Hui and Sylvia Chang also happen to be the typical high caliber multi-media multi-task executives who can write, direct, produce and act, not to mention their filmmaking community service and charity works.
[90] It was released in the US in 1977 and the English title is *The Fruit Is Ripe*. The Chinese title *Lee Lai-chun The Fruit is Ripe* is a blatant rip off.
[91] The income was donated to the victims of the flooding in Southern China that year. Wong Jing was one of the 9 screenwriters. The other three directors besides Ko were Tsui Hark, Alfred Cheung (Cheung Kin-ting) and Joe Cheung (Cheung Tung-cho) all veteran filmmakers known for being efficient in production.
[92] Herman Yau is my senior in college. He is a prolific filmmaker and speaks from his experience of working at various posts from director, writer to cinematographer and varieties of films. His films range from the serial killer hit like *The Untold Story* (aka Human Pork Chop 1993), to horror flick the *Troublesome Night* series (1997-1999), to the award-winning political film *From the Queen to the Chief Executive* (2001). He also works as cinematographer of Tsui Hark in *The Legend of Zu* (2001) and *Time and Tide* (2000).
[93] "Juchang" means theater. According to the interviewer Freddie Wong Juchang was the only serious film journal in Hong Kong and Taiwan at that time.
[94] This is a Chinese political and history magazine published between 1970-1998. In 1984 it was renamed The 1990s.
[95] Besides the Diaoyu Island dispute and the tense Cross-Strait relationship, there was also the student-spearheaded massive rally protesting widespread corruption and the fight for legalizing Chinese as an official language. It was also the decade when the Hong Kong economy was about to take off.
[96] Joyce Chan has only 15 entries in Hong Kong Film Archive's database. She is the writer of Ann Hui's *The Secret* (1979) and *The Spooky Bunch* (1980) and Patrick Tam's *Love Massacre* (1981), *Nomad* (1982) and *Cherie* (1984).
[97] According to City Entertainment's interview, he has produced more than 1,000 scripts.
[98]http://ipac.hkfa.lcsd.gov.hk
[99] The other four consultants are Michael Hui, Raymond Wong, John Woo and Wong Jing.
[100] Today, Louis Cha's martial arts novels are translated into almost a dozen languages around the world.
[101] Sammo Hung described, "Barry Wong and I are together for 24/7. We even go to bathroom together. Even my wife gets jealous of our close relationship…We dine together, watch movies together, discuss together. The four of us (Sammo Hung, his director, assistant director and script writer) communicate very

well." (Liu and Li 24)
[102] For example, *The Boys from Fengkuei* (1983), *A Summer at Grandpa's* (1984); *Time to Live and Time to Die* (1985); *Dust in the Wind* (1986); *Daughter of Nile* (1987); *A City of Sadness* (1989); *The Puppetmaster* (1993); and *Good Men, Good Women* (1995)
[103] Read Janet Staiger, "Standardization and Differentiation: The Reinforcement and Dispersion of Hollywood's Practices," The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960, ed. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson (New York: Columbia UP, 1985).
[104] John Downing's original phrase, "In fact, whenever mainstream media form choose not to represent important facets of social or political reality, alternative media flourish. A poorly photocopied sheet of paper may be seized upon and shared by many people if the need is real." In that article, Downing defines and confines alternative media to "politically dissident media that offer radical alternatives to mainstream debate." John Downing, "Alternative Media and the Boston Tea Party," Questioning the Media: A Critical Introduction, ed. John Downing, Ali Mohammadi, and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi (Sage, 1995) 240.
[105] Wong Jing is known for criticizing Hong Kong film critics. When asked if he can think of a good film critic, Wong Jing's answer is Sek Kei. Wong Jing thinks Sek Kei is fair and has his own perspective. Ernie Au, "Wong Jing: I Am an Entertainer," City Entertainment April 12-25 2001.
[106] The Chinese Wikipedia has one of the fan sites that systematically organizes the stock characters of the major gamblers films into a "character relationship chart", Available: http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ipro/pressrelease/060816e.htm.
[107] Pathological Gambling (PG) is an impulse-control disorder: "The essential feature of Pathological Gambling is persistent and recurrent maladaptive gambling behavior that disrupts personal, family, or vocational pursuits… The individual may be preoccupied with gambling" American Psychiatric Association, "Pathological Gambling," Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth ed. (Am Psych Assn).
[108] For example, in the press release of Chinese University of Hong Kong Department of Marketing in 2006 about their findings of "A Survey on Gambling Behaviours of Hong Kong People 'Will You Become a Gambler?'", gambling was framed as a problematic behavior in itself. They stated, "The study aims to help the Hong Kong Government, relevant organizations and citizens to realize the potential problems of gambling and to identify solutions." In their list of the ten major research findings, they stated that gambling led to the following impacts: a) addiction to gambling and helplessness; b) betting amounts increasing; c) psychological damage. Their recommendation to government, the education department and parents was to deliver an anti-gambling message, and for parents and senior members of family to "stay away from gambling activities to act as a role model." (http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ipro/pressrelease/060816e.htm).
[109] At the Berlin International Film Festival, it won the Alfred Bauer Award, the Teddy best feature film award etc.
[110] It won seven awards at Hong Kong Film Awards and Hong Kong Film Critics Society Awards that year including best film.
[111] In contrast Yoshiko Yamaguchi (Chinese name: Li Xianglan; English name: Shirley Yamaguchi) a Japanese woman playing Chinese in Japanese war propaganda film was exonerated after the war. Her name is used as a gag in another Stephen Chow movie *From Beijing with Love* (1994)
[112] It is said that Yoshiko Kawashima had no picture taken in her life. The character is based on a Hong Kong movie *Kawashima Yoshiko* (Eddie Fong, 1990) with Anita Mui playing the title character
[113] In the 1990s it was common in migrating family that the husband/father going back to work in Hong Kong while the family settle in Canada. In Hong Kong, there is a "home without a wife". In Canada there is a "house without husband". For more read Roland Skeldon, ed., Reluctant Exiles? Migration from Hong Kong and the New Overseas Chinese (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 1994).
[114] Andy Lau won his first best actor award in Hong Kong Film Award for this film.
[115] They are Hong Kong Repertory Theatre, Hong Kong Ballet Company, Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra and Hong Kong Dance Company Siu Tip Tao, "The Birth of Hong Kong Repertory Theatre: A Product of Rationality," (Course paper for Advanced Humanities

Seminar, Hong Kong Baptist University, 2008), vol.
[116] Part of this chapter is published in Cindy S.C. Chan, "Organized Chaos: Tsui Hark and the System of the Hong Kong Film Industry," The Swordsman and His Jiang Hu: Tsui Hark and Hong Kong Film, eds. Sam Ho and Wai-leng Ho (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2002).
[117] Rumor has it that Tsui Hark and Nansun Shi divorced around 2008. They neither confirmed nor denied it. They were assumed to be married in the early 1980s but were actually officially married in 1996. In this chapter I'll refer to Nansun Shi as Tsui Hark's wife for convenience of discussion.
[118] See Cheuk-to Li, "Through Thick and Thin: The Ever-Changing Tsui Hark and the Hong Kong Cinema," The Swordsman and His Jiang Hu: Tsui Hark and Hong Kong Film, eds. Sam Ho and Wai-leng Ho (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2002), Ping (Lam Mei Nin) Lam, "Tsui Hark Interview," Hong Kong Weekly 1989.
[119] In the story, the mentor disciplines the Monkey King by chanting some magic words. The tiara on the Monkey King's head will be tightened and cause him a headache.
[120] Her name sometimes is also written as Selina Chow Liang Shuk-yee
[121] CTV operated between 1975 and 1978. The rest of the history of Hong Kong television industry was between TVB and RTV/ATV until late 1990s.
[122] Seminar on "The Celluoid Swordsman; Tsui Hark and His Cinema – Creativity and Reinvention – Scriptwriting in Tsui Hark's production" Hong Kong Film Archive. August 8, 2001.
[123] John Woo made his version of the prequel into *Bullet in the Head* (1990), also set in Vietnam during Vietnam War.
[124] I cannot find the official English names of some of these clubs and thus use pinyin as a substitute.
[125] For a complete HKIFF staff list from 1977 to 1996 read Emily Lo, "Appendix: Festival Staff List," Hong Kong International Film Festival 20th Anniversary Souvenir Book, ed. Emily Lo (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1996).
[126] Film Bi-Weekly issue 13, July 5, 1979. p. 35-39; issue 14, July 19, 1979.p.33-38; issue 15, August 2, 1979. p.48-52; issue 16, August 16, 1979. P.43-45.
[127] Peggy Chiao received her masters degree at Radio-TV-Film department of University of Texas at Austin. She studied in the Ph.D. program at UCLA.
[128] Liu Damu described that Tsui Hark felt betrayed when Keeto Lam left him and worked with other people. Source: personal chats with Liu Damu around the summer of 2001.
[129] In the interview James Wong talks about Tsui Hark enthusiastically. He says that during the production he hated Tsui Hark for driving him crazy. But Tsui did bring out the best in him.
[130] The action sequence of Master Wong and Yan Zhendong in the courtyard is lengthened in the American version. In terms of the screen time he has, Yan Zhendong, instead of the Westerners, is the leading villain.
[131] I am using a Hong Kong version VCD for this study. In theatrical release and VCD versions, it is a common practice of Hong Kong cinema to have both English and Chinese subtitles.
[132] "Aunt Yee" is used in the English subtitle. In the dialogue, Master Wong addresses her as "Aunt Thirteenth". Later when she becomes his fiancée, he addresses her by her Chinese first name. The appellation "Aunt Thirteenth" easily reminds the older Chinese audience of the time in Chinese society when fertility was celebrated and it was not uncommon to have more than one dozen siblings.
[133] She is called Peony in English subtitle in part III. But in Part VI she is called Diana.
[134] In the English subtitles of part VI (*Once Upon A Time in China and America*) he is called Seven.
[135] It was awarded Best Actress, Best Cinematography, and Best Art Direction at Taiwan's Golden Horse Film Awards.
[136] Its American title is *13 is not much*
[137] For example, in a newspaper interview article, the reporter writes in the introduction that his friend anticipated the midnight preview of *Chungking Express* and said he would put on a tie to enter the theater. Back then the dress code of midnight preview was usually casual wear. (Pan)
[138] At present, he speaks fluent Cantonese, Mandarin, French and English.
[139] Conversation with Christopher Doyle, in the 1990s.
[140] For example, in *My Wife is 18*, the Charlene Choi character who is 18 and married to an older man. To

present herself as mature and complicated, she put on a flowery cheongsam like the one in *In the Mood for Love* and swayed her hips when walking into the restaurant and introduced herself to her husband's friend.

[141] Listed on the web page of the Film Services Office, (FSO), Hong Kong http://www.fso-createhk.gov.hk/accessibility/eng/pro_credit_detail.cfm?serial=43

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